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ABSTRACT

This study first provides a review of literature relevant to curriculum autonomy and school-based curriculum development, with special emphasis on Australian secondary schools. The second part of the report analyzes Australian secondary school staff's perceptions of: 1) the meaning of curriculum autonomy, 2) the advantages and disadvantages of curriculum autonomy, and 3) the extent to which curriculum autonomy is used in their schools. The vast majority of the respondents defined curriculum autonomy as school-based curriculum development. The three most frequently cited advantages of this system were greater freedom, flexibility, and variety in the curriculum: greater teacher involvement, satisfaction, and commitment; and better ability to meet the needs and interests of the individual school. Disadvantages included limitations imposed by parents, exams, and employers: extra work in planning and coordination of curriculum: and lack of experienced staff for curriculum development. A summary and discussion of these findings is included along with implications for further research. (Author/CJ)

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MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS
OF
CURRICULUM AUTONOMY

ALAN CRAIG

REPORT OF A POSTGRADUATE PROJECT
COMPLETED AS A PARTIAL REQUIREMENT
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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Alan Craig

Alan Craig

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ABSTRACT

A movement has occurred recently across Australia in which greater emphasis has been given to the professional role of the teacher and the school as a unit in making curriculum decisions. This phenomenon has been most commonly called "the school-based curriculum development movement" or "the move towards increased curriculum autonomy". Such developments appear to have arisen through the combined influence of at least nine different factors, the most important of which has been the distribution of various reports and memoranda to schools by state and territory departments of education from the late 1960's and onwards. While viewpoints on curriculum autonomy have been expressed by educational administrators and academics, little research has been conducted to determine the opinions of people at the "grass roots" level, namely, the teaching profession.

The purpose of this study was to gather information concerning curriculum autonomy from secondary school staffs across Australia. The information required was obtained from the data bank of an Australia-wide research study entitled "the Curriculum Action Project (CAP)". The present enquiry consisted of a detailed analysis of responses to two open-ended items included in the CAP questionnaires, which were returned by 586 respondents (principals, heads of department and teachers) from 98 secondary schools.

Analysis of the data revealed that the vast majority of respondents offered the same interpretation of the term "curriculum autonomy", namely: it means that the school/teachers have freedom to determine the curriculum, or it means school-based curriculum development. Most respondents offered this basic interpretation without any amplification or qualification. However, some respondents included in their definitions reference to the curriculum meeting local needs and conditions and/or reference to freedom from "outside" control.

Respondents across Australia perceived eight advantages/benefits and eight disadvantages/limitations associated with curriculum autonomy. The three most frequently mentioned advantages were: greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum; being better able to meet needs and interests of individuals at the local school level; and greater teacher involvement, satisfaction and commitment. The three most frequently mentioned disadvantages were : limitations imposed by "external" factors e.g. parents, exams, Department, employers; extra work in planning and coordination of curriculum development; and lack of experienced/qualified staff for curriculum development. Of significance was the finding that in all states, except Queensland, a greater percentage of respondents mentioned advantages than disadvantages of curriculum autonomy.

Generalising across Australia, the majority of respondents perceived either full or partial curriculum autonomy being available in their secondary schools. However, there were marked differences across states with Queensland teachers reporting, on the whole, a fairly limited degree of autonomy. By contrast most respondents from N.S.W., Western Australia and Tasmania claimed at least partial autonomy. Moreover, a substantial majority of respondents from South Australia, the Northern Territory, Victoria, and particularly the A.C.T., reported full curriculum autonomy.

In conclusion, this study revealed a wide range of perceptions about curriculum autonomy held by secondary school staffs across Australia. Several implications for further research and for educational practices were outlined.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The term "curriculum development" is generally used in educational circles as a broad term for many different kinds of activity relating to planned change in the curriculum. In Western countries over the last decade there has been a shift in patterns of curriculum development towards greater decentralization, more involvement of the "grass-roots" teacher, and a devolution of decision-making from the centre to schools.

This pattern was seen to occur in most OECD countries in 1976. Such a trend has been commonly called "the school-based curriculum development (SBCD) movement" or "the move towards increased curriculum autonomy". Inherent in most conceptions and descriptions of this movement is the notion of autonomy. Curriculum autonomy suggests the freedom and responsibility of a person or group within a school to determine the curriculum without external interference or control.

According to many curriculum "experts", definite benefits will be gained from the granting of such freedom to schools, for example:
. school staff members can best determine the optimum use of resources and teacher expertise;
. the school is best placed to perceive and cater for the needs and interests of its children;
. teachers who have devised a curriculum will be more committed to its successful implementation.

There are also, in the opinion of curriculum "experts", particular disadvantages/limitations associated with curriculum autonomy, for example:
. teaching staff have had little experience or training in the processes involved;
. teacher time to engage fully in required activities is limited;
. reconciling what may be conflicting demands - external examinations, parental expectations, community pressures and teacher ideals.

The advantages of curriculum autonomy are considered to outweigh the disadvantages, but the evidence obtained from empirical research studies is not conclusive on this point. Indeed, the studies conducted suggest that there are probably just as many disadvantages as advantages associated with the granting of freedom to schools in curriculum development.

In Australia, this SBCD movement appears to have arisen through the combined influence of several different factors, the most important of which seems to have been the distribution of various reports and memoranda to schools by state and territory departments of education from the late 1960's and onwards. Such statements granted varying degrees of curriculum autonomy to schools and paved the way for different forms of SBCD. In this respect, the movement has been more a "democracy by decree" than a result of an upsurge of demand from the schools. Nevertheless, it is clear that the move towards curriculum autonomy is an important feature of the contemporary Australian educational scene.

Most of the viewpoints on this movement have been expressed by administrators and/or academics in "official" memoranda, reports, journal articles, books and conference papers. Little research has been conducted to determine the opinions of people at the "grass-roots" level, namely, the teaching profession. Such research could contribute to an increased understanding of the successes, failures and problems associated with the granting of curriculum autonomy. The information gained could assist teachers, as well as curriculum planners and consultants who provide relevant guidance and advice to teachers, with the ultimate aim being the improvement of classroom practices.

This project thus had two major aims. The first was to provide a review of relevant literature about curriculum autonomy and school-based curriculum development, with special emphasis on the Australian situation. The second aim was to gather information concerning curriculum autonomy from *secondary* school staffs across Australia, with particular reference to their perceptions of:

. the meaning of curriculum autonomy;
. advantages and disadvantages of curriculum autonomy;
. the extent of curriculum autonomy available to them at their schools.

CHAPTER TWO

THE MOVEMENT TO SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT OR THE GRANTING OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY

This chapter considers the movement to school-based curriculum development within a world-wide context. After an initial clarification of the term "curriculum development", a brief review of different "types" of curriculum development across the world is given. This sets the scene for more detailed discussion of the meaning of "curriculum autonomy" and "school-based curriculum development".

2.1 TYPES OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

To define "curriculum development", it is necessary to first establish what is meant by curriculum. In the English language "curriculum" is commonly used to refer to "a course; especially a regular course of study as at a school or university". (Shorter Oxford Dictionary) However, some writers equate curriculum with a written prescription of what should happen, while others use the word to refer to the actual experiences which are offered to learners (Stenhouse, 1975: 2).

These differences are more sharply focussed in comparing use of the word in different countries, where difficulties of translation as well as of understanding are encountered. Many European countries have no word which exactly corresponds to what Anglo-Saxons understand by curriculum. The lack of a common vocabulary reflects important differences of belief about education and schooling (CERI, 1975: 9).

The tendency in the English-speaking world has been to widen the meaning of the Latin derivative "curriculum", meaning "race-course". Thus it has been defined, for example, by Doll (1978: 6) as "the formal and informal content and process by which learners gain knowledge and understanding, develop skills and alter attitudes, appreciations and values under the auspices of the school". This definition reflects a broad approach to education generally; indeed, it makes the term curriculum all but co-extensive with schooling. Such an all embracing view of curriculum is connected with a tradition of education in which "instruction" in school "subjects" is seen as being only a part - not necessarily the most important part - of the school curriculum concerned with the whole moral, intellectual, emotional and social development of the pupil.

In contrast, many European countries have traditionally regarded "instruction" in subjects or disciplines as being the important function of the school, reserving the word education for the larger, more nebulous business of upbringing in which the family, the church and the community at large play roles of varying importance. It is largely in this tradition that certain European countries lay down syllabus, content and methods which teachers are expected to follow in more or less detail. In common international parlance it is not unusual for these published documents to be described as "the school curriculum" (CERI, 1975: 10).

Somewhat in clarification of this and other dilemmas, Klein et al. (1975) have provided a useful framework for considering curriculum, suggesting that there are five basic levels of curriculum conception:
a) ideal level - the array of ideas, as the ideal set forth by someone;
b) formal level - the negotiated curriculum, as set forth by some authority, or group, in writing, as a plan or a prescription;
c) perceived level - the curriculum as perceived by the teachers or parents or students or citizens;
d) operational level - the curriculum that is idiosyncratic to the teacher in the classroom;
e) experiential level - the curriculum as experienced by the learner - the actual curriculum.

In this paper, the broad definition of "curriculum" will be used. However, distinctions such as those suggested by Klein et al. (1975) above will be made wherever appropriate. *Curriculum is therefore defined as all the learning experiences under the auspices of the school.*

If we have settled for a broad definition of the term curriculum, it follows that curriculum development too must be broadly rather than narrowly defined, as the generic term for many different kinds of activity relating to planned change in the curriculum. *In this paper the definition of curriculum development given in the CERI handbook will be used, as follows:*

> ... it covers the process of analysing and refining goals, aims and objectives, together with the translation of these into the content of courses by formal or informal methods. Moreover, because the curriculum extends to

> 'all the experience of children for which the school should accept responsibility', curriculum development is concerned with what actually happens between teachers and children, as well as what is supposed to happen. (CERI, 1975: 12)

In 1971 a conference was organized with the express purpose of identifying different types or "styles" of curriculum development - "that is, sets of related characteristics about the way curricular change is organized" (Maclure, 1972: 7). Numerous ways of describing or classifying a variety of curriculum development styles were presented in background papers. In attempting to draw conclusions from the conference, Maclure (1972: 35-47) identified three inter-related "watershed issues" which best demonstrated contrasts in curriculum development styles: a) the contrast between centralised and decentralised systems; b) the impact of curriculum development on the role of teacher; and c) relationship between the centre and periphery. Each of these issues is discussed briefly below to demonstrate the variety of traditional curriculum development patterns found across different countries (see for example: CERI, 1975; Maclure, 1972; and McMahon, 1976).

2.1.1 The Contrast Between Centralised and Decentralised Systems

In discussing types of curriculum development, Maclure (1972) suggested that the most polarising issue was

> ... the efficacy of country-wide, long-term comprehensive rulings and specifications concerning school organisation and curriculum versus local initiative with incomplete specifications developing specificity with experience... (Maclure, 1972: 37)

In the United States and Canada control of the school curriculum is decentralised to the local school board or in some cases the states. In the Continental European countries formal controls over the curriculum are exercised by central government education ministries or, in the case of West Germany, the Lander education ministries. In England and Wales a complicated system of formal and informal constraints apply, with legal control vested in local government authorities and the voluntary church bodies, who have resigned in effect their controlling powers to school principals. These, in their turn, are limited in the exercise of their freedom by external examinations linked to admission to higher education at the end of the secondary course (CERI, 1975: 14; McMahon, 1976: 128).

Where the school curriculum is laid down centrally (whether by the State, province, local authority or school board), the formal document setting down the official programme may be in considerable detail (as in Norway and Sweden) or be limited to an outline syllabus (as in some of the German Lander). It usually prescribes the number of timetable hours to be devoted to each subject and may, as in Scandinavia and lately in France, deliberately provide for a limited period of the week to be at the elective disposal of the school or the local school board. It may prescribe the text books and other teaching material or set down a list of approved books and teaching aids from which schools can choose (CERI, 1975: 15).

In large measure centralisation or decentralisation reflects the political landscape. At any given time the balance between central and local organs of government is changing, but only at times of major upheaval are the changes sudden or radical. Modifications take place from time to time. For example, the Swedes seek to transfer more responsibility to the local authorities. The British reduce the number of local authorities with a view to devolving more power, while setting up new central institutions like the Schools Council which informally exercise a unifying function. In the United States, the extremes of decentralisation are adjusted in practice from time to time by national programmes (Maclure, 1972: 36).

2.1.2 The Impact of Curriculum Development on the Role of the Teacher

Opinions about the role of the teacher are essentially value judgements and these impinge on styles of curriculum development. What is at issue may not be what the teacher actually does, but a myth about the teacher's role which, in England, for instance, determines options in curriculum development:

> ... the myth of the autonomy of the teacher as master of his fate and his pupils' curriculum... is a myth in the sense that it expresses great truths in a form which corresponds more to an idea than to reality. The less factually correct it may be, the more important it is to assert... To refer to this as a myth is not to denigrate it. It is a crucial element in the English educational idea. It is the key to the combination of pedagogic, political and administrative initiatives which provide the drive for curriculum reform in England and Wales... (Maclure, 1972: 41)

The English view is that the case for the teacher's autonomy is most formidable, not on grounds of philosophy, but on grounds of practice. That is, that the best way to enlist the teacher's commitment to any innovation, or to the idea of innovation as a recurrent phenomenon in education, is to implicate him in the process. Unless the teacher is so implicated, he will resist and in all probability defeat the efforts of the innovators (Maclure, 1972: 42).

People from Sweden, Germany, France and elsewhere in Europe generally do not regard teacher participation and teacher-control as either uniquely necessary to obtain the desired result, nor yet wholly compatible with public control of the education system. The Swedes have sought systematically to meet the teachers' professional needs by in-service training and by consulting with them in many ways in drawing up organisational and curricular policies. It would be out of the question for them to cede to the teachers' responsibilities which properly belong to the elected representatives of the community. The hostility of some of the teachers might be an inevitable price to be paid for one or other aspect of educational reform which conflicted with the vested interests of teachers (Maclure, 1972: 42; McMahon, 1976: 129).

2.1.3 Relationship Between the Centre and the Periphery

Curriculum development in many countries has been based on a centre-periphery relationship. The centre might be a central government curriculum department or agency, developing new courses and new materials with more or less experimental assistance from schools on the periphery. The centre then issues the products which result from this process to the schools for optional or required use. In this respect there could be a great deal in common between a project sponsored by a foundation or a university in the United States, or by the Schools Council or Nuffield Foundation in England, or by the National Board of Education in Sweden, or a central agency for curriculum development in a German state. A centre-periphery relationship is axiomatic if it is maintained that society's social and political aims in education must be formally worked out by democratically-centralised institutions. It is also implicit in methods of innovation which are based on the large-scale application of educational technology (Maclure, 1972: 44; McMahon, 1976: 130).

Other projects, including some of those described by the Schools Council (CERI, 1973: Ch. 3), are less centrally and more peripherally controlled, the development taking place at the periphery and flowing towards the centre, not vice-versa. This can be seen also in other kinds of curriculum development, especially those inner city ventures which link the renewal of a school and its whole life with the renewal of the surrounding community (Deal and Nolan, 1978).

2.2 THE MEANING OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY AND OF SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

The brief overview just presented substantiates the importance of the three inter-related issues identified by Maclure (1972) for distinguishing patterns of curriculum development. In Western countries over the last decade there has been a shift in these three factors with respect to curriculum development - towards greater decentralization, more involvement of the "grass-roots" teacher, and a devolution of decision-making from the centre to the periphery. Indeed this pattern was seen to occur in most OECD countries in 1976 (CERI/CDC, 1976). Such a trend has been most commonly called the "school-based curriculum development (SBCD) movement".

The very popularity of the phrase SBCD has contributed to its partial degeneration into an educational slogan. Other less frequently-used terms to describe this movement, such as "school autonomy", "curriculum autonomy" and the "devolution of authority/responsibility for curriculum", are also open to varying interpretations. Nevertheless, the notion of "autonomy" is inherent in all conceptions and descriptions of the school-based curriculum development and this will be discussed first.

Harris has provided a useful general analysis of autonomy:

> To be autonomous is to be independent and self-governing. Originally, I think the term was used in a political context - an autonomous group being one free from external rule and responsible for self-government.
>
> Autonomy and freedom are closely related concepts: to any extent that one lacks freedom one lacks autonomy. Responsibility is also a related concept: it would be strange to talk of a person being autonomous if he had no conscious control over his actions, if he was not 'responsible' for what he did. (Harris, 1972: 119)

Harris (1972: 126) goes on to note that, if autonomy is bound up with notions of making free and responsible choices, it follows that autonomy is a matter of degree. Furthermore, autonomy involves the possession of knowledge - without which the concept of "responsible choice" is quite meaningless. The more knowledge a person has, the wider is the range of choices open to him.

Applying Harris's general analysis specifically to curriculum development, *"curriculum autonomy" suggests the freedom and responsibility of a person or group to determine the curriculum without external interference or control.* This is the working definition used for this paper. In any school such curriculum autonomy could occur at any of four basic levels: the individual teacher; groups of teachers (e.g., departments or faculties); the whole school staff; or the school community (school staff, students, parents and citizens).

In the simplest terms, school-based curriculum development implies that the school should have curriculum autonomy, that is, that the school should have freedom and responsibility for determining objectives, curriculum content, learning resources and teaching, learning and evaluation procedures. As stated, however, this definition is perhaps too simple. It neither acknowledges the complexity of curriculum decision-making in any national system, nor helps in understanding who may be involved in the process of SBCD, what are its advantages and disadvantages and why the movement towards SBCD has occurred.

Hughes (1978) pointed out two common misinterpretations of SBCD. One related to the confusion of school-based with teacher-based curriculum development. In his view, it is inappropriate for individual teachers to develop courses in isolation. Not only may there be inconsistency, duplication and omission between individual courses presented at the same time, but there will be a lack of continuity in both purpose and content between successive courses.

Another misconception, noted by Hughes (1978), is to interpret school-based as school-limited curriculum. SBCD implies that responsibility is taken by the school for the curriculum, but to be limited to only those courses designed by the school suggests a rather egocentric myopia which denies to the school and its pupils courses and resources from the outside, which may often be better than those produced within. Such a concern was also expressed in the first resolution of the National Conference of the Australian Primary Principals' Association, 1977:

> While this conference acknowledges that many advantages are to be gained from the involvement of teachers in curriculum development at the school level, the conference asserts that it is uneconomical, indeed wasteful, in terms of time, energy and personnel, to expect each school to be responsible for the development of a totally school based curriculum and that such a task is beyond the capacity of the great majority of the schools. (APPA, 1977: 1)

Skilbeck (1976a) suggested that school-based curriculum development is a new name for an old idea:

> The idea is that the best place for designing the curriculum is where the learner and the teacher meet. For example, ... Socrates built up his curriculum in and through relationships with students who displayed an aptitude for philosophical and mathematical reasoning. This was school-based curriculum development with the public places of Athens serving as the school and the joint dialectical experience of the teacher, his peers and his pupils constituting the curriculum. (Skilbeck, 1976a: 90)

The point of these remarks was not only that the idea of SBCD is an old one, but also that it *is* an idea, even an educational philosophy, and not simply a method or a technique. SBCD makes six major claims, according to Skilbeck (1976a: 90-91), and these are paraphrased below:

a) The curriculum is made up of experiences, which should be of value, developed by the teacher and learner together from a close and sympathetic appraisal of the learner's needs and characteristics.

b) Freedom for teacher and for pupils is a necessary condition for the full educational potential of these experiences to be realised - freedom to define objectives; set targets; select learning content; modulate the range and tempo of learning tasks; determine what is appropriate in the form of both criteria and techniques; and assess the extent to which the potential value of the learning situation has been realised.

c) The school is a human social institution, which engages in complex transactions with the environment involving exchange of ideas, resources and people through a network of communication systems. The school's responsiveness to this environment depends upon its freedom to build up its own curriculum.

d) Curriculum development is an intellectually demanding and onerous task which calls into play all the teacher's competencies and skills; its success depends upon the development of quite substantial support systems.

e) SBCD does not preclude curriculum development at other levels than the school, nor does it deny a creative role to others than teachers and pupils. One of the major tasks for policy makers is to help allocate types of curriculum decision to different agencies from local to national level.

f) Teachers can act effectively as curriculum developers, but part of the necessary support system for SBCD is an extensive in-service education programme.

An Australian curriculum study group, which considered ideas from the literature and from three conferences, came up with the following very comprehensive "definition" of SBCD:

> SBCD is a modification of a traditional system of curriculum determination emanating either from a school principal or a central state board of education, and implies the development of a more participatory form of decision making relating to curriculum development and implementation. It is important to note that while the whole school community should be aware of and involved in the planning of the internal development, SBCD does not necessarily imply development across the whole curriculum. It may relate only to a part of the school. Also in qualitative terms, it may be selective, or adaptive as well as creative.
>
> SBCD is a continual, dynamic process optimally involving teachers, students and community. Ideally, this will mean the development of a flexible and evolving set of experiences for the students, incorporating activities and materials from many sources.
>
> The modification of the traditional system does not imply a severance of existing relationships, rather it suggests a shift in responsibility and the establishment of a different pattern of relationships. An example of this changing pattern would be a developing association locally between the school and other schools and institutions.
>
> The school will obviously need to maintain support and administrative links with the centre as well as forging a range of connections at the periphery.
>
> These modifications demand an increased sensitivity in the relationships among all involved and an overall review of services, roles and structures. In particular, increased professional responsibility is entailed for the teacher who will have more opportunities for initiating change than in the past. (Rawlinson and Spring, 1979: 35)

This definition is really an explanation of the "ideal" characteristics of SBCD for the Australian educational context, as perceived by the authors. The study group also outlined two conceptual schema which provided a better understanding of SBCD than mere definitions. The first schema (see Figure 2.1) showed different relationships between the "centre" and the "periphery". The "centre" referred to the central authority, the wider community and central support services, while the "periphery" referred to schools, local support services and the local community. Part A of Figure 2.1 showed one extreme as a centralized system in which the initiatives came from the centre and the relationships with the periphery were highly defined. Part D, the other extreme, showed the school as the focus with two-way relationships occurring between it and the centre.

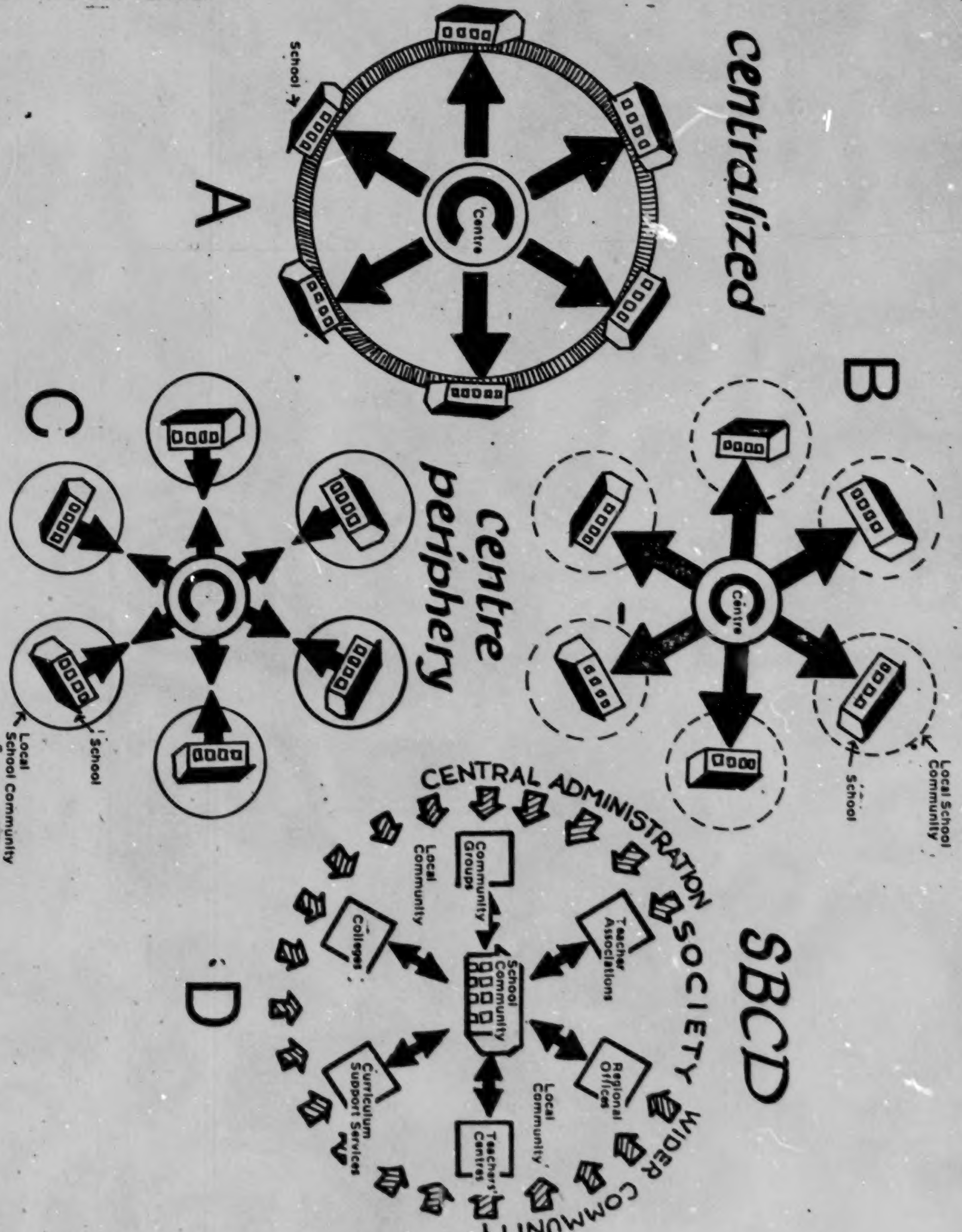
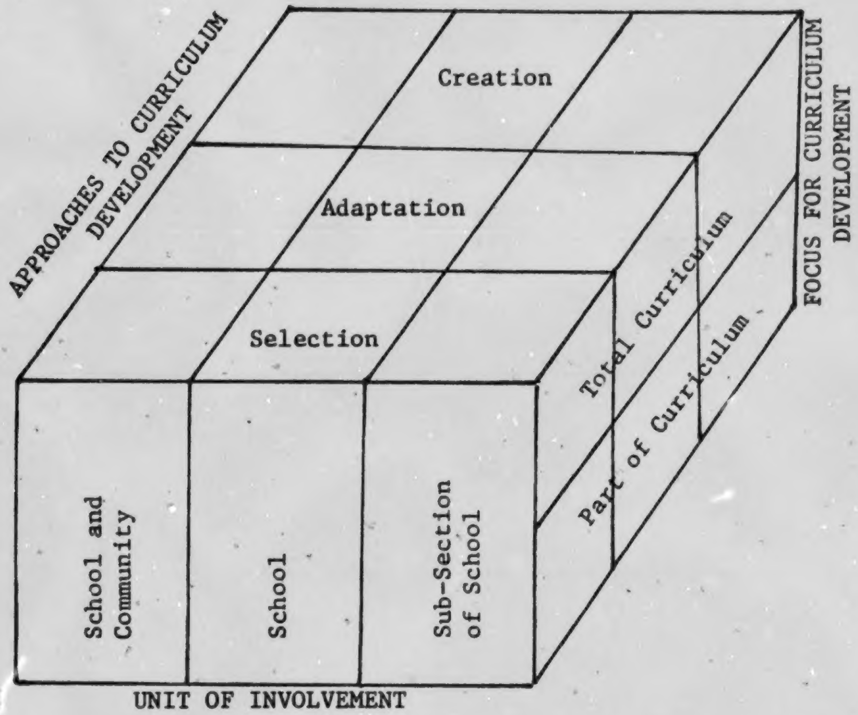

centralized
Centre
School
A
B
Centre
Local School Community
School
centre periphery
C
School
Local School Community
SBCD
CENTRAL ADMINISTRATION
SOCIETY
WIDER COMMUNITY
Teacher Associations
Regional Offices
Local Community
Community Groups
School Community
Teachers' Centres
Local Community
Colleges
Curriculum Support Services
D

FIGURE 2.1: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE "CENTRE" AND THE "SCHOOL"

The second schema provided by the study group (Rawlinson and Spring, 1979: 40) indicated various "boundaries" of SBCD in a three dimensional model (Figure 2.2). One dimension referred to the three approaches to curriculum development which may be taken by a school - selection, adaptation, or creation. A second dimension outlined the three units which might be involved in SBCD - the whole school and community, the school only, or a sub-section of the school (e.g., the Maths Department). The third dimension referred to the focus for curriculum development - the total curriculum or some part of it (e.g., Social Studies). The implications of the schema are that schools should make a calculated decision as to what aspect of SBCD they wish to become involved in.

FIGURE 2.2: BOUNDARIES OF SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT


APPROACHES TO CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
Creation
Adaptation
Selection
FOCUS FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
Total Curriculum
Part of Curriculum
School and Community
School
Sub-Section of School
UNIT OF INVOLVEMENT

In summary, curriculum development in any system of education is a complex phenomenon involving a network of relationships among central bodies, local school communities and individual teachers. *SBCD implies a fair degree of curriculum autonomy for the school, that is, freedom and responsibility to develop a curriculum suited to local circumstances, without external interference or control. SBCD may focus on a part or all of the school curriculum; it may involve part or all of the school community (students, parents, teachers) as participants; and, in qualitative terms, it may be selective, adaptive or creative.* This is the working definition of SBCD used for this paper.

CHAPTER THREE

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF GRANTING CURRICULUM AUTONOMY VIA SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Several writers have claimed that there are certain benefits or advantages of granting curricula autonomy to schools via SBCD; at the same time they have recognised various disadvantages of and/or limitations to the granting of such freedom. These views are outlined below in the order: advantages, disadvantages. In a third section a review is presented of empirical data supporting or conflicting with some of the arguments about advantages and disadvantages of granting curriculum autonomy.

3.1 EXPERT VIEWS ON ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS OF GRANTING CURRICULUM AUTONOMY VIA SBCD

In a paper concerned mainly with teacher education, Phillips and Nettle (1978) mentioned the following benefits of SBCD:

> (a) a chance for teachers to invest their minds, feelings and values in a multi-faceted task and to develop in a practical and relevant context their creative skills;
>
> (b) an opportunity for teachers to expand the notion of curriculum design to encompass, within given parameters, the planning of a total school environment for learning;
>
> (c) a context for improving teachers' sensitivities to the expectations which various communities have for the education of their children and a stimulus for them to reflect on their own expectations in a given situation with a given set of children;
>
> (d) a stimulus for teachers to develop their own observational and analytical powers;
>
> (e) if the above four really happen, a better deal for children. (Phillips and Nettle, 1978: 1-2)

Carlin et al. (1976) claimed that SBCD "has clear advantages", which they listed as follows:

> (a) Schools vary so much that the members of staff of a school are in the best position to determine the optimum use that can be made of that school's particular resources and teacher expertise.
>
> (b) The needs and interests of children vary and the school is best placed to perceive these and to cater for them.

(c) The people actually implementing the curriculum are those who have devised it. Thus the gap between theory and practice is narrowed. Further the participants should be fully committed to the decisions taken.

(d) The relatively small scope of decisions being made makes the introduction of new ideas more feasible.

(e) It becomes easier to involve parents and community leaders meaningfully in curriculum planning.
(Carlin et al., 1976: 9-10)

In summarizing the proceedings of a national conference held in Sydney during June 1977, Connors (1978: 7-8) outlined several arguments for school-based decision-making. While the conference was concerned with decision-making in a variety of areas apart from curriculum (e.g., finance, school buildings, staffing), the arguments, paraphrased below, are still relevant to this discussion:

a) Involved and informed people can and should participate in making the decisions which will affect them. Schools should prepare students for life in a participative democracy and so should reflect democractic principles in their own organisation.

b) When schools are able to make decisions affecting their own teaching-learning situation, they will be more likely to meet the educational needs of each student in our complex, multi-cultural and changing society.

c) The wide variety of opinions and demands now found even within one local community seems to call for new methods of decision-making. There is a general social trend towards maintaining authority by consensus and influence rather than by decree.

d) It should lead to improved efficiency in the deployment and use of resources to promote effective learning. Those on the spot are the best, if not the only people, qualified to assess the needs of students.

e) If parents and the community generally become more closely involved in what happens in schools, it will be an educational experience for all and will bring a new dimension to the concept of "lifelong education".

Several arguments about the advantages of SBCD emerged also during two conferences held in Canberra during August-September 1975 and June 1976. In summarizing these arguments, Rawlinson and Donnan (1979) came up with the following list called "Claims for SBCD":

(a) The process rightly shifts curriculum development closer to where decisions are to be implemented.

(b) Opportunities for school autonomy are enhanced.

26

(c) Given new and greater opportunity to become involved in curriculum-making, teachers should acquire greater awareness about what they teach and why they teach it.

(d) There will be more opportunity for goals and values orientation to be related to the school's community.

(e) There will be greater flexibility and opportunity for locally-oriented problems based on locally-perceived needs.

(f) There will be a much greater opportunity to involve students, parents and the community.

(g) Curriculum development would become more ongoing, formative and open-ended in nature. (Rawlinson & Donnan, 1979: 6)

Skilbeck (1976a: 92-94) supplied perhaps the most detailed argumentation about the case for SBCD in five major points. His principal argument centred on the need for the teacher and the learner to enjoy sufficient freedom to form educative relationships:

> Externally imposed syllabuses, textbooks, examinations all defined educational values and set certain standards which are, of course, important from the standpoint of the individual as well as for national and social purposes; however, they make the spontaneity, flexibility and diversity which are an equally important part of education much more difficult to achieve. The learner's first-hand experience is consequently neglected despite its rich educational potential. (Skilbeck, 1976a: 92)

Skilbeck's second argument concerned the contrast between primary and tertiary education on the one hand and secondary education on the other. In the United Kingdom, there is wide-spread agreement that primary education has benefited in many different ways from the reduction of external constraints on the curriculum; a similar freedom has long been enjoyed by university teachers. But great pressure is exerted on secondary schools through examination boards which are heavily influenced by the expectations of university teachers, even though the vast majority of pupils passing through these secondary schools never undertake any higher education.

Third, SBCD was seen by Skilbeck as partly a reaction against a failure in practice of the descending models of control and dissemination to produce a satisfactory educational system. There were two points here. First, in the United Kingdom there is a distrust amongst teachers, or at least amongst their official representatives, of anything suggestive of national curriculum control. Control of a kind certainly is exerted through the examining boards, but these boards are not governmental agencies, and they are teacher-dominated even if the major single influence is often the university teacher. The second point which Skilbeck made about dissatisfaction with descending models has perhaps more relevance to American than to British experience. It is the claim that the massive investment in national projects dominated by scholars from the disciplines and by management strategies has paid inadequate dividends in the form of changed schooling.

> Some truly remarkable attitudes were engendered by this managerially dominated movement, including that which treated the teacher as a functionary in a technically bureaucratic system whose alleged incapacities could be surmounted by that system's producing 'teacher-proof' learning packages. (Skilbeck, 1976a: 93)

Fourth, Skilbeck noted that teacher involvement in the processes of curriculum making is "more consistent with a professional self-image, with a sense of professional achievement and with a more complex sense of personal value and worth than is the functionary image". (Skilbeck, 1976a: 93) The remarkable upsurge in recent years of the phenomena of power-sharing, participatory decision-making, and populist resistance to technocracy, which directly challenge the values, assumptions and procedures of hierarchy, all provide a congenial climate for SBCD.

A final argument adduced by Skilbeck in favour of SBCD is that it provides more scope for the continuous adaptation of curriculum to individual pupil needs than do other forms of curriculum development. Learning systems dominated by national and international textbooks, by pre-specified "ground to be covered", by external examination syllabuses, and by development projects are by their nature ill-fitted to respond to individual differences in either pupils or teachers. Yet those differences, of experience, social class, intelligence, motivation, interest, learning style and so forth are of crucial importance in learning.

3.2 EXPERT VIEWS ON DISADVANTAGES OF AND LIMITATIONS TO GRANTING CURRICULUM AUTONOMY VIA SBCD

Most of the authors cited above, who proposed various benefits from the granting of curriculum autonomy to schools via SBCD, also recognized certain disadvantages associated with such freedom. Thus, Carlin et al. (1976) suggested that SBCD "presents many problems that must be taken into account":

(a) Teaching staff have had little experience or training in the process involved.

(b) There is very little theoretical knowledge and no useful model available to assist schools in the process.

(c) The way that schools are organised at the moment means that teachers do not have the time to devote much effort to the process of curriculum planning.

> (d) In most schools, there is little communication about curriculum matters between teachers, between the teachers and the community, and between teachers and the students.
>
> (e) The school-based curriculum will entail substantial changes in the social roles of the inspector, the principals, and the teachers. Role changes are among the most difficult to bring about.
>
> (f) There is a danger that schools will feel a pressure to become quickly involved in the process and decisions will be made too hastily. (Carlin et al., 1976: 10)

In summarizing the proceedings of a national conference held in Sydney during June 1977, Connors (1978: 39-44) outlined several problems with or limitations to school-based decision-making. These points, paraphrased below, appeared under the chapter heading of "some conditions for success":

a) School principals may need to develop management, communication and leadership skills, since many have been used to exercising personal authority and taking a very large share of responsibility.

b) Information cannot be force-fed into an uninterested community with no desire at all to govern its own schools. The process of devolution from central authorities also involves the assumption of powers by those at the school level.

c) Many schools lack the time and facilities for group activity and, sometimes, the expertise to actually *develop* curricula. The reality for schools is often making choices, rather than decisions, and that choice is often between existing ideas, methods and materials.

d) Greater school independence and autonomy in the area of curriculum must not be allowed to create an insatiable demand for support services; schools must learn to be realistic.

e) In some communities there will be a broader range of views on all aspects of schooling than in others. How difficult or easy is it to handle this divergence or even conflict within a school?

f) Many of the more significant and long-term decisions taken by the most democratically constituted of school councils will have far more effect on those yet to arrive in the school than on the decision-makers themselves.

g) Making decisions about the school's curriculum takes a good deal of teachers' time. Is this time to come from time formerly spent in teaching? If parents are to join in consultative processes when will this occur?

Several arguments about the disadvantages of SBCD emerged also during two conferences held in Canberra during 1975 and 1976. In summarizing these arguments Rawlinson and Donnan (1979) came up with two lists, which they called "Claims Against SBCD" and "Potential Constraints". The first list was as follows:

(a) There is a limited awareness of the scope and possibilities of the movement.

(b) There is a danger that external pressures may defeat the purpose of SBCD if the school does not or cannot retain the initiative.

(c) There may be limited, and uneven, access of schools to required support.

(d) The quality of the school programs will vary - unfortunately with the quality and commitment of staff and community.

(e) At present there is considerable role confusion in relation to schools and agencies beyond the school.

(f) There may be conflicts in viewpoint at the school and/or system level.

(g) There is the problem of both staff and student mobility.

(h) There is a danger of premature evaluation.

(i) The process places heavy demands on teachers' time and energies.

(j) Support services in this transitional phase are in a state of disarray. (Rawlinson and Donnan, 1979: 6)

Rawlinson and Donnan saw potential constraints as:

(a) teacher time to engage fully in required activities;

(b) school autonomy in selection and deployment of staff;

(c) extent of control over the natural and physical facilities;

(d) access to funds and budget allocation;

(e) freedom in selection of curriculum materials;

(f) access to in-service education;

(g) community pressures;

(h) legal requirement and system accountability. (Rawlinson and Donnan, 1979: 7)

Skilbeck (1976a: 102-3) provided a very comprehensive list of problems associated with SBCD:

(a) A sense of low self-esteem and inadequacy in staff, and lack of relevant skills, e.g., in analysing objectives, constructing tests, working in planning groups, etc; failure of authorities to provide advisory and specialist consultancy services.

(b) Lack of interest or conviction in staff, particularly in sustaining change processes over a period of time; careful planning is hard work.

(c) Inadequate allocation of resources (time and personnel as well as money); rigidity and bureaucracy in control of resources.

(d) Conflicting priorities on part of teacher, e.g., planning, teaching, assessing, private study, increased leisure and recreational interests; lack of incentive to teachers to engage in planning and evaluation.

(e) Rapid staff turnover.

(f) Reconciling what may be conflicting demands, e.g., Ministry requirements, external examination, parental pressures, pupil interests, teachers' educational values.

(g) Inadequacy of theoretical models - teachers tend to reject what they cannot easily apply.

(h) Complexity of issues and of managerial problems, e.g., designing, and implementing individual study programmes within a common core curriculum.

(i) Failure to appreciate subtleties of group interactions when the balance of power in an existing institution is threatened.

(j) Tendency of institutions to revert to earlier forms of organization and control if the pressure for change is not continuous.

(k) Discontinuance of new practices before they have been fully implemented and diffused.

(l) Neglect of the diversity of successful teaching styles and range of possible strategies of change (premature selection of one set of procedures in preference to possible alternatives which either singly or in combination may be more effective).

(m) Failure to carry out optimizing studies, e.g., what is the distinctive contribution to curriculum development of schools, national project teams, universities, colleges, national and regional administrations? (Skilbeck, 1976a: 102-3)

A list of problems and issues associated with SBCD, as comprehensive as that provided above by Skilbeck, but perhaps reflecting more the Australian context, has been compiled by Rawlinson and Spring (1979: 54-59). This list is paraphrased below:

a) Perceptions - The perceptions of SBCD held by people involved within the school community are a key problem, e.g., time-tabling can very easily be perceived as a constraint on SBCD if the full possibilities of flexible scheduling are not realised.

b) Confidence - The normal uncertainty or suspicion with which some teachers and school administrators (often rightly) approach what appear to be "new trends" has to be overcome.

c) Informing the General Public - There will be a continuing need to clarify what SBCD entails in public debate on education, e.g., what is SBCD and where does it fit in, if at all, to the current standards versus progressive education controversy and core curriculum versus "cafeteria"?

d) Expectations - The expectations of parents for their children and their acceptance of the school's objectives may be crucial factors in determining the success or failure of school-based activities.

e) The "Tyranny of Distance" - Isolation and large distances between centres is an Australian characteristic which makes the delivery of support systems to the teacher extremely difficult outside capital cities and the large country centres.

f) Time - The overarching problem in SBCD is time. Some areas where increases in time can be expected are consultation with other teachers and updating and revision of courses.

g) Awareness - A key problem is how to make teachers aware of what the concept can mean for them and allied to this is the need to work out, through consultation, just what the process of SBCD will be in a particular school.

h) Misconceptions - Attempts at SBCD have meant in some schools radical alteration of the structure of the school curriculum, e.g., some schools offer a "cafeteria" of unsequenced choices, others regard all courses as being of equal value.

i) Continuity - Australia is a highly mobile society, thus continuity between schools is a problem. Equally difficult is the problem of continuity within schools where high teacher turnover and inadequate recording systems for both student progress and work undertaken may lead either to discontinuities or to repitition.

j) Matching Learning Materials with Courses - There is now appearing a considerable range of flexible materials (e.g., ASEP and SEMP). But it is still a widely occurring problem that available materials may fall short of the needs expressed by a school community for the effective study of a particular area.

k) Evaluation - What kinds of evaluation of the school's courses and programs are appropriate in the school-based context, e.g., should the purpose be to assist the school to continuously improve its program? should it be to make judgement about the success or failure of particular courses? should evaluations of school programs be kept confidential, or made public?

l) Staff Selection - Should the school which has worked out its own aims and goals in consultation with its own community have a say in the selection of staff?

m) Communication - There will almost always be problems of communication between the school and the support system at the local, regional and system level. Often images become distorted, e.g., SBCD in some places has come to mean "doing your own thing" or "each teacher has to devise his own curricula".

n) Human Relationships - In SBCD the interface between teachers and parents as well as the interface between teacher and teacher are both areas of concern, e.g., teachers unused to consulting with and working with parents have new skills to learn; parents will need information to enable them to appreciate what their role can be.

The above examples of views on the advantages/disadvantages of granting curriculum autonomy via school-based curriculum development vary in length, written expression and scope of arguments. However, within each group there is considerable overlap of ideas and the examples are sufficient to indicate the *range* of views one would obtain from consulting any group of such curriculum "experts". It is significant that most experts perceive *both* advantages and disadvantages associated with curriculum autonomy. To a few curriculum theorists, this suggests that some sort of compromise is needed between the two extremes of centralized and local curriculum development.

Connelly (1972) has argued this point quite convincingly. He is opposed to a purely "top-down" model of curriculum development on the grounds that it "tends to treat teachers as mere transmitters of ideas". He is equally opposed to simply a "local school activity" model, which "tends to treat teachers as the initiators of ideas and materials". (Connelly, 1972: 161) His suggestion is that the Centre, or "external developer", should reduce its efforts to convince teachers of the worth of particular curriculum materials and, instead, treat them as alternatives for teacher choice, giving informative descriptions of the performance of the curriculum materials under a variety of instructional circumstances: "These descriptions would be obtained during an evaluation-research phase in which development was broadly conceived of as an experiment in classroom intervention." (Connelly, 1972: 176) The teacher or "user", is expected to develop skills associated with the role of "choice-maker".

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Such a view is compatible with Stenhouse's "research model of curriculum development", in which the curriculum is characterised as a "probe" through which to formulate and test hypotheses, rather than as a "recommendation to be adopted". (Stenhouse, 1975: 125) The external curriculum developer is cast in the role of investigator, rather than as a "man with a mission", and the teacher adopts the role of researcher, testing the tentative hypotheses of the developer through research in his own classroom: "A particular kind of professionalism is implied: research-based teaching." (Stenhouse, 1975: 141)

In a similar vein, Goodlad claims that what is needed for curriculum renewal is "productive tension between an inner drive for renewal, and ideas, services and encouragement from without". (Goodlad, 1975: 115) His practical procedure for establishing and maintaining this "productive tension" has been to join with "several colleagues" to create in Southern California "a consortium of 18 schools named the League of Co-operating Schools".

> Envision, if you will, a wheel with spokes connecting our offices, the hub, with each school and a rim connecting the 18 schools. It was our intention to reduce, over time, the strength of the spokes in favour of strengthening the rim connecting the schools. (Goodlad, 1975: 114)

In summary, the wide range of views on the advantages and disadvantages of granting curriculum autonomy, presented above, indicates that many curriculum theorists have given considerable thought to the matter. However, the question must be asked: what *empirical* evidence is there which supports or conflicts with such expert opinion?

3.3 EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE CONCERNING CLAIMED ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF GRANTING CURRICULUM AUTONOMY

There is certainly overseas evidence linking teacher involvement in curriculum development with commitment to the successful implementation of that curriculum - one of the most frequently mentioned advantages. For example, early research on decision-making by Chase (1952) indicated that teachers with the opportunity to participate regularly in policy-making were more likely to be enthusiastic about their school system. In a study by Sharma (1955), it was found that teachers' participation in decision-making was directly related to their satisfaction with teaching. An important study by Johansen (1965) revealed that both individual teacher participation in curriculum planning activities and perception by teachers that they were influential in curriculum decision-making increased the likelihood of curriculum implementation. This study was simulated by Duet (1972), who showed a significant relationship between teacher participation on curriculum committees and their implementation practices. Langenbach (1969) found significant differences in the attitudes of teachers to curriculum use between those who had participated in curriculum planning and those who had not.

Evidence that teachers value classroom autonomy is available from the work of Jackson (1968) who conducted interviews with fifty U.S. elementary school teachers identified as successful by their superiors. Two main threats to autonomy were perceived: an inflexible curriculum and an invasion of their classroom privacy by their superiors for the purpose of evaluation. As Jackson put it: "Apparently these teachers feel most comfortable with the classroom door closed and the curriculum guides tucked away in the supplies closet" (Jackson, 1968: 132-3). On the other hand, it was noted that teachers did not emphasize the need for an extreme classroom autonomy. They expressed a desire for collaboration with other teachers - expecially art and music specialists. Nor did they desire to construct their own syllabuses from scratch, but welcomed guidelines within which they could enjoy some spontaneity. Similar results were obtained in a cross-cultural study of primary teachers from Eastern and Western countries, which included a brief examination of decision-making (Edman, 1968). The teacher respondents felt that the responsibility for curriculum decision-making should be a shared one among experts, education department personnel and the local school staff. Two thirds of the teachers surveyed wanted curriculum guidelines from a higher authority such as a ministry of education though they were also in favour of giving teachers a say in deciding the curriculum. They wanted to follow general guidelines laid down externally, but wanted, at the same time, to be able to adapt these guidelines to their own situations (Edman, 1968: 75-80).

In recent years, the technique of organization development (OD) has been applied in the school situation to enable staffs to make the best use of curriculum autonomy. Flynn (1975) described the impact of the adoption of collaborative decision-making procedures in his school, which began in 1970 with an OD intervention intended to train the school faculty in communication skills, group processes, problem solving and decision-making. Results of a 1974 staff survey showing widespread understanding and support of the collaborative structure were contrasted with the results of a similar survey before the OD intervention. A similar study by Johnson (1976) found that teachers involved in team teaching and joint teaching demonstrated considerably more influence in school decisions on personnel, administration, pupil management, curricula, and teaching methods, than did teachers in schools where there was no collaboration. Moreover, in such situations principals as well as teachers felt more, rather than less, influential. While all these are overseas studies, implications might be drawn for the Australian situation.

There is some evidence also that Australian teachers wish to participate in school decision-making. A survey by A.C.E.R. in connection with the Australian UNESCO Seminar in 1972 on the Teaching of English produced some interesting results (UNESCO, 1973). The response to the statement, "The primary teacher needs a definite syllabus designed by curriculum specialists", was as follows:

	N.S.W.	VIC.	QLD.	S.A.	W.A.	TAS.	A.C.T.
agree	50	23	67	45	59	51	34
uncertain	13	13	8	16	12	7	12
disagree	37	64	25	39	29	42	54

Taken alone, these results would suggest that in 1972 teachers in Victoria and the A.C.T. were in the main opposed to central prescription of curriculum, whereas teachers in Queensland, N.S.W., and Western Australia were more in favour of it. Those in South Australia and Tasmania were fairly divided in their opinions. In the same survey, however, the statement, "A primary teacher should be free to plan his own courses guided chiefly by his own professional knowledge" drew a pattern of responses ostensibly inconsistent with the above results:

	N.S.W.	VIC.	QLD.	S.A.	W.A.	TAS.	A.C.T.
agree	56	67	57	53	38	59	71
uncertain	6	11	14	16	17	22	5
disagree	38	22	29	31	45	19	24

At first sight, one might have expected for this question a pattern of answers almost exactly opposite to that of the first. But a majority of teachers in all states, except Western Australia, agreed that teachers should have prime responsibility for curriculum development. On reflection, however, many teachers may have desired curriculum autonomy while at the same time they valued the guidance of syllabuses designed by curriculum specialists. These findings suggest, therefore, that Australian teachers may not see a necessary conflict between central curriculum statements and individual school or teacher autonomy in curriculum development.

One commonly-mentioned disadvantage of granting autonomy is that it inevitably causes a change in roles for all concerned. An example of the dilemma created by changes in traditional roles was provided by Bentzen et al. (1974), who reported on the common characteristics of typical primary schools which may hinder SBCD. In the sample of American schools studied, they isolated a significant characteristic of a school staff's perception of its role in interactions with outside resources. This is the "expert-client model", which defines the school staff as the client in need of the higher-level information possessed by the outsider. This dependency situation is part of the "tell-me-what-to-do" syndrome, with its accompanying paradox of scepticism for advice from "experts" who are not at the chalk-face and have little knowledge of the classroom situation. The findings of Shipman et al. (1974) were similar: teachers asked simultaneously for a clear blueprint to follow and freedom to adjust materials and methods to their own classroom conditions.

Another disadvantage/limitation is that principals may not be able to create the right climate for school-based initiatives. There is certainly considerable research evidence linking school climate and principal leadership style with teacher participation, attitudes and morale. For example, Chung (1970) showed that a high "teacher-centred" management style of leadership behaviour by public school principals, as perceived by teachers, and high job satisfaction of teachers were significantly related. Teacher-centred administrative management style was characterized by teachers as: a) much sharing in decision-making; b) less close teacher supervision; c) high administrative support of teachers' professional growth; d) strong personal relationships; and e) accessable relationships. In a study by Feitler (1972), four principal behaviours - tolerance of freedom, consideration, integration, and tolerance of uncertainty - were found to be significantly higher for schools having participative group organisational processes, than for schools described as having more authoritative processes. Isherwood and Hoy (1973) indicated that a majority of teachers in "authoritarian" schools experienced a greater sense of powerlessness, than did their peers in "collegial" schools. From their research with 179 teachers at 14 vocational centres in Maryland, Laird and Luetkemeyer (1976) concluded that teacher morale was related to the leader behaviour of the principal. Hughes' (1975) study of successful innovating secondary school heads showed that such persons were seldom perceived as thrusting, entrepreneurial, autocratic initiators. These innovators relied more on their influence as professionals than on bureaucratic power to command; they acted as promoters of participation and catalysts of co-operation.

These examples from the research literature are sufficient to indicate the importance of the principal in facilitating or inhibiting teacher involvement in curriculum development. (For other evidence on this issue see: Ambrosie and Heller, 1972; Kunz and Hoy, 1976; Musella et al., 1975; Simpson, 1976; and Valentine et al., 1975.) Moreover, Wiggins (1972) has found that the longer a principal remains at a school, the greater becomes the level of significance of the relationship between his behavioural characteristics and school climate. However, it would be naive to expect principals alone to change the "principalship". As McNally (1975) has noted, a major problem for principals is that their expectations of what their role should be often differ widely from the expectations of central office administrators, parents, teachers and students. Holley et al. (1976) found that in the United States school board chairmen and superintendents tended to see principals as part of management, while teachers, teacher association leaders, and principals identified principals more closely with teachers. This may not be true, however, for the Australian situation.

Another problem in SBCD is that teachers need to be convinced that curriculum development is a priority in the allocation of their time. In an exploratory study of aims, influence and attitudes in primary education in Britain, Taylor et. al. (1974) suggested that one source of problems for schools contemplating self-initiated curricula could be what they called "the mutuality of teacher and taught". The teacher secured vocational reward from what took place in the classroom and had little interest in how the school's curriculum was ordered, what its purpose was in detail or whether change in it should take place. The teacher aimed mainly to secure a personally manageable and satisfying set of transactions with the pupils in his or her own class. Shipman et. al. (1974) also reported that teachers were concerned in the main with the immediate problems facing them in the classroom. This study also revealed that many teachers perceived changes in routine as threats to teacher-pupil relations and to standards of work. Stolee (1974) claimed that Alberta teachers were not able to develop their own curriculum, despite the granting of a large degree of autonomy in curriculum development. He suggested that not every teacher wants to be, or should be, a curriculum maker.

The results of a research study initiated by the Inner London Education Authority also suggested that many teachers have neither the time nor the inclination to be involved in participatory decision-making. This was because:

- some teachers can't give the time to talk to others, e.g., those who travel long distances, some married women;
- some don't want to give time to such consultation and only want to be left alone to do their job and be protected from colleagues by the principal;
- among others the school day is that time when teaching takes place;
- too much discussion could possibly lead to the development of interpersonal tensions;
- many teachers are inexperienced;
- staff may leave a school either before a final decision is made or before a decision is implemented and results are forthcoming. (Baron, 1975)

Even if attitudes can be changed, the personal characteristics and circumstances of many teachers may prevent their full involvement in curriculum development. For example, Kardas and Talmage (1970) found that the degree of teacher participation in curriculum development was positively correlated with greater number of years of experience, greater number of years in present system, fewer children in family, higher salary, and greater participation in inservice education.

In discussing characteristics such as these associated with SBCD, it is useful to consider some of the facts relating to the Australian teaching force. Campbell's survey (1975) showed that many of the Australian government-school teachers were young and inexperienced, and also, he claimed, minimally qualified. Another significant group isolated by Campbell's survey was that of married women, who were combining heavy home and teaching duties and were not inclined, it was suggested by the Campbell data, to participate fully in any out-of-class activities of the school. These are significant findings as many of the suggestions for group decision-making require ample allocations of time, free of pupils and other duties.

In summary, there is empirical evidence supporting the following advantages of granting curriculum autonomy to schools:

a) more involvement of teachers in curriculum planning, problem-solving, shared decision-making and group activities such as team teaching;

b) greater teacher commitment to the successful implementation of the curriculum;

c) the likelihood that a particular curriculum will actually be implemented is increased;

d) greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum;

e) the school is better able to meet the particular needs and interests of individual students and teachers at the local level;

f) teachers are more enthusiastic about and satisfied with their particular school system and teaching in general.

On the other hand, there is empirical data supporting the following disadvantages of granting curriculum autonomy to schools:

a) the problem for teachers of a role change - from being passive recipients of official documents to active planners and constructors of their own curricula;

b) principals, through their leadership style, may not be able to create the right climate for school-based initiatives;

c) teachers need to be convinced that curriculum development is a priority in the allocation of their time;

d) some teachers lack the ability to develop their own curriculum;

e) enthusiastic and capable teachers may still lack the necessary time.

CHAPTER FOUR

CURRICULUM AUTONOMY AND SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN AUSTRALIA

This chapter is concerned with the movement towards greater curriculum autonomy and school-based curriculum development in Australia. After a brief review of traditional patterns of curriculum development, nine "general trends" which have led to increased curriculum autonomy for Australian schools are treated. In a final sub-section, the question of whether or not SBCD is here to stay in Australia is discussed.

4.1 TRADITIONAL PATTERNS OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Systems of public education in Australia reflect a commitment to the principle of universal, compulsory education and the belief that schools should offer everyone an equal chance of schooling. In practice, this was interpreted historically as a need for "equal and uniform provision" throughout each individual State system of education, but not necessarily among State systems or between State and other systems. With a need to provide schooling to students in widely dispersed communities and with money for public schooling being raised centrally by State Governments, centralised government systems of education emerged naturally in the Australian setting. Compared with many other comparable countries, they achieved an impressively "equal" spread of resources among schools. (Bassett, 1966; Karmel Report, 1973)

The traditional decision-making processes in the large State systems have been described by Bassett (1966) and by Connors (1978), and may be paraphrased as follows. The only decision taken by most Australian families with regard to their children's schooling was the decision of where to live. This choice prescribed the selection of a particular primary school. The choice of secondary schools was a decision often made beyond the school and related to the student's performance, either academic or in other areas. "Among teachers in the large systems, a mythology developed in which the system was depicted like some strange Czarist bureaucracy, remote and faceless on the one hand, but with tentacles reaching to the tiniest corner of the State on the other." (Connors, 1978: 4) Teachers would refer to telegrams which ordered them to proceed immediately to the school at the point most remote from all areas they had indicated as preferred appointments. Each system had what might be described as the "formal" curriculum, that is, the official statements and syllabuses issued by the Department of Education. Traditionally these documents were comprehensive and fairly prescriptive, more so in the early years of this century. Most of the materials which arrived in schools came bearing the familiar departmental crest. Other materials which had been "requisitioned" for some special purpose often turned up long after the teacher who had asked for them had left. There would even be a "departmental" handwriting style, taught through the State.

In such systems with the main centres of authority lying outside the individual schools, it was no wonder that principals and staffs had little opportunity or incentive to participate in decision-making. However, Bassett (1966: 35-36) was one of the first to comment upon a "promising development", involving "... a more liberal administration ... with greater delegation of authority ... and a more co-operative approach to school planning". Central to this national movement, which has gained momentum over the last decade, has been the granting of increased curriculum autonomy to schools, thus paving the way for experimentation in different forms of school-based curriculum development (Beeson and Gunstone, 1975; Connell, 1977; Kemp, 1977).

4.2 GENERAL TRENDS LEADING TO INCREASED CURRICULUM AUTONOMY AND SBCD

A number of trends or events in Australian education have been identified by Rawlinson and Spring (1979) as contributing factors towards increased curriculum autonomy and SBCD. Some of these trends or events had a discernible direct influence; others created a facilitative climate for curriculum autonomy in more indirect ways. These major influences are outlined below, drawing upon the discussion of Rawlinson and Spring (1979: Ch.1).

4.2.1 Devolution of Responsibility by States and Territories

Beginning in the late 1960's a number of influential reports and statements to schools emanated from the various departments of education. These gave increased emphasis to the professional role of the teacher and the school as a unit in making curriculum decisions. Cohen (1971) was among the first to describe these changes, with particular reference to science teaching. Full details of such developments are provided in the next chapter.

4.2.2 *Framework Changes in Curriculum and Assessment Provisions*

In Australia the gradual removal of external examinations and their replacement by various forms of internal assessment, external accreditation and moderation began in the 1950's (Rawlinson and Spring, 1979: 14). The last State external examination at the end of primary school took place in 1961. Since then primary schools have enjoyed increasing curriculum freedom although often within broad central guidelines. By the middle 1960's, as well as normal courses designed for prospective matriculants, new lower secondary courses were being developed for students intending to leave school at Grade 10 (or 15+ equivalent). Over the next 10 years, all States progressively removed the external examination at Year 10 or the end of lower secondary education. During this time high schools tended to become less elitist and more comprehensive at lower secondary level (Rawlinson and Spring, 1979: 14).

4.2.3 *The National Curriculum Committees*

In the middle 1960's moves were taking place in Australia to seek Commonwealth funding and involvement in curriculum development. In 1967 the Commonwealth organized two seminal conferences under the auspices of the UNESCO National Education Committee. One was held on social science teaching and the other on science teaching. Building on the work the Australian Council for Educational Research had pioneered in science education through the Junior Secondary Science Project (JSSP), the Commonwealth and States jointly funded Australia's first national curriculum project, the Australian Science Education Project (ASEP). The ASEP experience proved the feasibility of Commonwealth/State cooperation in curriculum development (Rawlinson and Spring, 1979: 18).

The National Committee on Social Science Teaching (NCSST) was established in October, 1970 as another joint venture of the Commonwealth and the States. This Committee took the view that the establishment of a national curriculum centre, which had been mooted during 1972, would best meet its needs. Subsequently the decision to set up the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) was announced in June 1973. In November 1973 the NCSST made a submission (SEMP, 1974) to the Interim Council of CDC for a major project in the area of social education. The Minister for Education announced the commencement of a three year development project in July 1974, the first major undertaking of the CDC. In 1973 the NCSST designed and implemented the first national level scheme to encourage teachers, schools and groups of schools to engage in school-based curriculum development. This scheme was called the NCSST Small-Scale Grant Scheme (NCSST, 1974).

Following a recommendation from the conference sponsored by the UNESCO Australian National Education Committee in 1972 (UNESCO, 1973), the Commonwealth established a National Committee on English Teaching (NCET) in 1975. During the early 1970's three other areas, Asian Studies, Aboriginal Education and Environmental Education, became recognised as national priorities for curriculum development. The national curriculum committees thus had the effect of stimulating SBCD and teacher participation in national projects, as well as encouraging the formation of CDC.

4.2.4 The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC)

The CDC's interest in SBCD dates back to the establishment of the Centre. The Interim Council adopted as part of its policy the notion that teachers needed to be involved as much as possible, if the resulting materials and teaching approaches were to have maximum effect in classrooms (CDC, 1975). The involvement of teachers in the process of development was regarded as being at least as valuable to teachers as the end-products of that process. It was also realised that the same emphasis on teacher involvement was just as crucial in the dissemination phase. The CDC's Triennial Programme for 1977-79 reiterated such an emphasis:

> The Centre's work must include a major emphasis on school-based approaches including the support required to make the school an effective agent of curriculum and cultural renewal. The reason for this is that, throughout the country, there is a discernible shift of the locus of curriculum decision-making from the traditional, centralised points of power, such as state departments and universities to regions, communities, schools and the teaching community itself. While it is by no means clear that this shift is welcomed by all members of the teaching profession, there can be no doubt about the need to provide various kinds of support and guidance if teachers are to cope with the new requirements. (CDC, 1977: 9)

Rawlinson and Spring (1979: 7) noted an apparent paradox in the idea of a national centre supporting SBCD. If one views a national centre as being located in Canberra, then actual physical remoteness from the classroom tends to cloud the issue. If the CDC was to be judged on the involvement of teachers in its policy and decision-making processes in the preplanning stages of projects then it may not score highly, despite efforts to consult widely through teacher groups. On the other hand, if one looked at the physical location of the Centre's projects and the degree of teacher and community involvement in their development, trial and dissemination, then a picture of widespread involvement of literally thousands of teachers and hundreds of groups emerges.

4.2.5 The Australian Schools Commission

The formation of the Australian Schools Commission, which followed the creation of CDC, also influenced the movement towards curriculum autonomy. The Interim Committee presented its report on May 18, 1973 (Karmel Report, 1973). One of its listed functions was "to encourage diversity and innovation in schools, curricula and teaching methods". The Committee favoured -

> less rather than more centralised control over the operation of schools. Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of the pupils whom they teach and, at senior levels, with the students themselves. Its belief in this grass roots approach to the control of the schools reflects a conviction that responsibility will be most effectively discharged where the people entrusted with making decisions are also the people responsible for carrying them out, with an obligation to justify them, and in a position to profit from their experience. (Karmel Report, 1973: 10)

The Committee re-affirmed its value positions in its recommendations, some of which apposite to this paper were: "diversity among schools in their structures, curricula and teaching methods"; "the devolution, as far as practicable, of the making of decisions on those working in or with the schools..;" and "the involvement of the community in school affairs" (Karmel Report, 1973: 139). Associated with the above beliefs, it recommended: grants for teacher developments; funds to provide for the establishment and operation of education centres; and a special project fund to foster change (Karmel Report, 1973: 148-149).

The Schools Commission acted in three general ways as an important catalyst in the trends towards devolution of responsibility and community participation (Connors, 1978: 18). First, its strong endorsement of these trends in its published reports gave leadership and support to all those groups working to further them. Second, in its own operations the

Commission laid considerable emphasis on consultative processes, including consultation with teacher, parent and community groups and other members of the public. Third, one effect of Commission funding was to introduce a degree of flexibility and choice, where at State, regional and school levels there was previously little room to move owing to shortage of funds or to entrenched patterns of dispersing funds. In addition, two of the Commission's own programs were predicated upon the principle of decision-making by individual schools or school communities, namely, the Disadvantaged Schools Program and the Special Projects (Innovations) Program. They had important effects, both directly with respect to decisions made within the programs and indirectly by providing a model to be followed or improved upon by other schools or in other areas.

4.2.6 In-Service Education

The NCSST began in 1972 to sponsor a series of national conferences aimed at encouraging the growing professionalism of teachers. Five national conferences on aspects of social science teaching were conducted between June, 1972 and May, 1974. However, the major impact of Commonwealth funding occurred during 1974 when the availability of relatively massive funds for in-service education became available to the States to augment existing State in-service programs. The procedures developed by State In-service Committees in response to guidelines suggested by the Schools Commission tended to foster local initiatives in curriculum development (Rawlinson and Spring, 1979).

Skilbeck et al. (1977), reviewing the first three years of major demands for the provision of inservice education, identified teacher self-development as possibly the most challenging task for inservice education. While this task was also seen as a control on unrealistic attempts to continue increasing resource allocation to inservice education, it was mainly proposed as a way of enabling teachers and communities of teachers to achieve independence, exercise initiative and assume responsibility for their own requirements.

4.2.7 *Change in the Design of Curriculum Materials*

There has been a marked trend towards designing curriculum materials which can be used flexibly. Rawlinson and Spring (1979) suggested this as being

> partly a consequence of the trend away from external examinations (and hence the requirement for prescribed course textbooks), partly through the introduction of teaching strategies such as enquiry learning which bring the learner into a different relationship with content and partly through the emergence of ways of organising learning to enable students to proceed through experiences and material at differing rates... (Rawlinson and Spring, 1979: 25)

The approach taken in recent national materials projects in Australia was consistent with the general notion that materials produced should be flexible enough to be capable of adoption into a wide variety of courses over several levels in most States. The idea that schools would include the materials into courses of their own design or alternatively plan courses around them was inherent in their design. ASEP and SEMP also combined this need for flexibility with the idea that materials ought to have a teacher development function.

4.2.8 *Growing Teacher Professionalism*

An increase in teacher professionalism has both caused and reflected the movement towards greater curriculum autonomy for schools. External exams were in large part removed because of advice and pressure from the profession concerning their adverse effect on some of the prime purposes of education. The removal of external exams had the effect, too, of placing additional demands on the teacher by expanding the range and complexity of the curriculum development tasks required at the school level. In addition, where moderation or accreditation systems were introduced teachers were involved in a new range of evaluation tasks both within and across schools. Similarly growth in skill, level of training, qualifications and confidence in the profession reduced the need for an inspectorate while creating other needs, for example, for expert practical and theoretical advice and for opportunities to exchange ideas and experiences with peers (Rawlinson and Spring, 1979: 27).

Over the last ten years in a time of growing public awareness of educational issues, teacher groups have been able to achieve better pay and working conditions for themselves and better facilities for students.

This demand by teachers to be professionals - to be masters of their own destiny - has also been reflected in their desire to be responsible for school programs, to determine their own progress through the promotion system and to be involved in services normally provided by central and regional authorities (Bassett, 1966: 35; Australian Teachers Federation Conference, 1974).

4.2.9 Community Involvement in Curriculum Matters

Increased community participation in curriculum development has been a latecomer to Australia. In the past, even where parents were formally involved in school matters, curriculum issues were not a main focus. Parental interest and activity have previously concentrated on fundraising and more recently, with the introduction of legislation establishing school councils or boards, on the development of policy and on financial and management matters.

A number of factors have worked to turn the attention of parents towards the curriculum during the middle 1970's, including the Schools Commission programs mentioned above which make parental involvement mandatory. Perhaps the most important factors have been the economic downturn with the accompanying high level of unemployment, as well as the associated growing public debate on "standards". The latter debate has been widely reported and sometimes grossly misrepresented in the media. Headlines such as the following support this point: "Australia's Education Scandal: We're Turning Out Millions of Dunces" (The Bulletin, May 15, 1976); "The Forgotten Art of the Three R's" (The Australian, May 18, 1977); "School Blamed for Million Illiterates" (The Australian, January 9, 1979).

In addition, where schools have introduced courses in controversial or sensitive areas, it has become common practice to consult with parents and to give them the opportunity to choose not to have their children taught a particular course. The introduction of MACOS (Man: A course of study) has followed this latter pattern, although it has still encountered strong opposition from small but extremely vocal interest groups in the wider community (N.S.W. Department of Education, undated).

4.3 THE PERMANANCY OF SBCD IN AUSTRALIA

In considering why the name SBCD has been introduced, Skilbeck claimed that:

> ...the name itself signifies the growing evidence of greater teacher freedom and autonomy, of dissatisfaction with imposed curricula, however scholarly in inception and elegant in form, of support systems which presuppose and facilitate teacher-curriculum development, and of courses in colleges and universities which encourage teachers to think critically and creatively about the curriculum. For these and other reasons it has become imperative to recognize the emergence of a movement, an idealogy, perhaps... (Skilbeck, 1976a: 91)

In a separate paper Skilbeck took the argument even further by suggesting the move towards SBCD as a decisive, "irreversible" shift in the pattern of authority and responsibility:

> In considering the theme of school-based curriculum development we would do well at the outset to recognise that what is occurring is not a minor adjustment in the pattern of authority and responsibility. It is my belief that we are in the throes of a decisive shift in our ideas about education and the role of the institutions through which our educational ideals and policies are realised. Taking a longer view of the history of education, we may observe that such shifts occur frequently and that their significance is not widely recognised at the time. Unlike fads and fashions their movement does not resemble that of a pendulum; they are irreversible. When in the midst of one of these larger transformations, it is difficult to distinguish enduring trends from the accompanying turbulence and cross currents. (Skilbeck, 1976b)

On the other hand, Mackenzie's (1970) review of strategies for curriculum change indicated that centralized and school-based initiatives have oscillated since the turn of the century. Furthermore, two features of the Australian curriculum autonomy movement may militate against any permanency, namely, its speed and fervour and its "top-down" character.

In Australia, because of a long history of a high degree of centralisation and control of the curriculum, the movement has had more fervour associated with it than would perhaps be the case in some other countries. Once the movement started with both Federal and State initiative and support, it seemed to accelerate so that, even in 1973, Fitzgerald argued that a major organisational dilemma had been caused as a result of "the widening separation between authority and responsibility".

He warned that "in a centrally controlled school system, the problem is not met simply by permitting a growing degree of functional autonomy at the local level. The need to apply suitable sanctions to teacher performance still remains" (Fitzgerald, 1973: 45).

It could also be claimed, as Walton (1978) has noted, that the movement is "top-down", that its origins were not at the grass roots level but emanated from the writings and discourse of intellectuals overseas and in Australia, and from administrators in State and Territory departments of education. To some extent this view may need to be modified when the activities of Teachers Federations are taken into account, particularly in the secondary field in Australia. Nevertheless, it does appear that SBCD is more democracy by decree than an upsurge of demand from the schools. Fitzgerald (1973) argued that the devolutionary movements were part of a "....strategic retreat - a deliberate policy by the centralised administrations to reduce their involvement in areas no longer subject to effective control" (Fitzgerald, 1973: 45).

Problems associated with the fervour of the SBCD movement and its top-down character might well be solved through increased teacher professionalism and therefore be regarded as only temporary constraints. However, it is worth considering in some detail the implications of what appear to be significant recent movements away from SBCD in both Ontario and England. Certainly, prior to 1976 the policy of the Ontario Ministry of Education had been to decentralise curriculum. An extract from a policy document illustrated this trend:

> Local curriculum development ... must involve as many practising teachers and principals as possible. Local curriculum development may take place at the school, the family of schools and the school systems level... The development of local curriculum statements ... require the widest possible involvement of principals and classroom teachers; the curriculum developed must be flexible so that the teachers may be able to modify it to meet specific needs as they arise. (Whitehead, 1977)

But in November 1976 the Minister stated: "We have embarked upon a major change in policy and direction related to curriculum development in Ontario. We are going to take a much firmer grip on what is actually being taught in the elementary and secondary schools of the Province" (Whitehead, 1977). This statement was made as a result of fears that: a) the curriculum of the schools had become less cohesive, less directive and possibly less challenging; and b) that the essential basics were being overlooked. The response to this concern in Ontario was a multi-phased programme. Phase one involved the announcement by the Minister of Education that, beginning September 1977, all students entering secondary school would be required to take an expanded core of mandatory subjects in order to qualify for a Secondary School Graduation Diploma. Phase two will involve the centralisation of curriculum development. It was hinted that future phases would include a return to formal assessment.

The question of curriculum control raised in Ontario was the theme of the Fifth Annual Conference of the British Educational Administration Society (Glatter, 1977). When the conference was planned in late 1975, control of the curriculum was not a burning topic of controversy. The fear of the English organisation was that it might not attract many participants. "In the event, it had become a highly charged issue ... such is the speed with which issues can take hold in education ... On July 2, 1976, a headline in the Times Educational Supplement announced: 'DES to keep sharp eye on the curriculum' ... the then newly appointed Permanent Secretary at the Department ... said that the key to the 'secret garden of the curriculum' had to be found and turned" (Glatter, 1977: 12).

Heralding the Government's "Green Paper" the Chief Education Officer for Lancashire stated: "We simply cannot afford the principle of self determination by an educational institution and especially the primary school as it becomes freed from examination constraints with the removal of the 11+" (Rainbow, 1977: 2). A month later on July 21, the Government's Green Paper, *Education in Schools*, was published. Its two main themes were a curriculum review leading to an agreed framework in all schools and improvement of teacher quality. The section in the Green Paper on the curriculum returned repeatedly to the idea of a core of essential studies which needed to be 'protected'. In the case of the secondary school, the principal points of unease were listed as:

(a) Overcrowding of the curriculum;

(b) Variations in approach to the curriculum in different schools which can penalise a child if he moves;

(c) Even if children don't move, variation from school to school may give rise to inequality of opportunity;

(d) Curriculum in many schools does not sufficiently match life in a modern industrial society. (Times Educational Supplement, 1977: 5-8)

The movement away from SBCD which is evident in Ontario and England, may well occur also in Australia, if public reaction to education continues. State-wide public seminars on education have been conducted in N.S.W. A return to some form of examination at 16+ has been canvassed. It should be stated that the outcry in the press and in the debating halls has not been overtly directed at SBCD but more at standards. Back to basics is more of a clarion cry than back to the centre, at least as far as the critics are concerned (Logan, 1979). However, the concern about the dismantling of State examination systems and syllabuses with a prescribed examinable core can be regarded perhaps indirectly as a yearning for the former centralised system.

Moral standards as well as academic standards have come under attack. Whilst the Australian Council for Educational Standards (A.C.E.S.) organised the resistance to what is considered to be a decline in academic performance, The Society to Outlaw Pornography (S.T.O.P.) and the Campaign Against Regressive Education (C.A.R.E.) were concerned with morality. It was interesting that the two particular objects of attack of these latter organisations were more centre-peripheral type of projects - Social Education Materials Project (SEMP) and Man: A course of Study (MACOS). Nevertheless it was the teachers in the schools who were publicly reviled in the newspapers.

> It could be suggested that teachers may well begin to display withdrawal symptoms and press for a return of some benevolent bureaucracy which will again prescribe guidelines, re-introduce external examinations at 16+, become again their surrogate conscience and protect them from the worst ravages of bearded Messel or the upward chisel thrust of a smiling Joyner. (Walton, 1978: 3)

The Great Debate in England and its fellow traveller in Australia may be associated with the conflict between two models of the curriculum, which have been conceptualised by Eggleston (1977) as the "received perspective" and the "reflexive perspective". In the former, curriculum knowledge "is accepted as a received body of understanding that is 'given', even ascribed, and is predominantly non-negotiable". In the reflexive perspective "curriculum knowledge ... is seen to be negotiable; in which content may be legitimately criticised and argued or new curriculum devised". (Eggleston, 1977: 52)

Walton (1978: 8) suggested that there could well be a direct relationship between the particular dominance of each of these models suggested by Eggleston and the prevailing economic situation. When the economy is burgeoning, society appears to be better able to consider alternatives and be more prepared to speculate about values over and beyond the basics. When the economy is depressed, however, the basics assume their predominance. In the present economic recession in Australia, it is no wonder that the climate of public opinion appears to be more appropriate to the received perspective.

Nevertheless, there are those who claim that no necessary opposition should occur between, on the one hand, a commitment to high standards of education and a support for core curriculum, and on the other, a belief in the value of SBCD. All three are seen as possible, no matter what the prevailing economic climate. Indeed, this is the view of the Curriculum Development Centre (Skilbeck, 1978), and of the Study Group on Support Systems for School-Based Curriculum Development (Rawlinson and Spring, 1979). Furthermore, it is important to remember that even in the most highly centralised education system, there will always be some degree of curriculum autonomy for teachers. This is because, "in the final analysis teachers must teach and the real maker of curriculum is the teacher as he constructs an operational curriculum appropriate to particular pupils and to a particular classroom situation". (Kemp, 1977: 2).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE EXTENT OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY/SBCD IN AUSTRALIAN STATES/TERRITORIES

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed several general trends in Australian education which have led to increased curriculum autonomy and thus to school-based curriculum development. In that discussion the devolution of responsibility for curriculum by state and territory departments of education was left for more detailed treatment in this chapter. Each state/territory, in order of postcode, will be dealt with under two sub-headings: (a) "General Policies and Trends" - a brief general historical review of the education system and of movements towards devolution of decision-making; and (b) "Curriculum" - an examination of the current situation of curriculum development in that state/territory, with particular emphasis on the extent of curriculum autonomy granted to secondary schools and teachers. A final sub-section compares the current position in the states and territories, as revealed by "official" statements, with research data on the perceptions of teachers.

Two major sources of information were used to glean data for this chapter. First, the official "position papers" presented at the national conference on "School-Based Decision-Making", held in Sydney during June 1977 (Schools Commission, 1978), provided the structure and much of the detail for treatment of each state/territory. Unless otherwise indicated, all the material below has been paraphrased from this source. Second, a letter was sent to the head of the curriculum/research branch in each state/territory department of education. This letter sought information through three questions: "(a) when were statements or memoranda to schools granting some freedom in curriculum development first distributed (if at all)? (b) how much autonomy was granted to schools/teachers in these statements? (c) has the official Departmental position changed since the first statements were announced?" Copies of relevant Departmental statements and memoranda were also requested in the letter.

Altogether five departments of education responded to this request (N.S.W., Victoria, South Australia, the A.C.T. and the Northern Territory). The treatment of each state/territory below varies in length, depending on the amount of material supplied in either the returns to the letters or the position papers from the Schools Commission Conference.

5.2 NEW SOUTH WALES (N.S.W.)

5.2.1 General Policies and Trends

Devolution to school level in decision-making is not new but has gained impetus over the last seven years. In 1972 a statement concerning primary schools noted that "Each school in the State has its own specific aims and objectives (and) in recent times principals and teachers have ... formulated their own courses and allocated time and emphasis as they deemed such to be educationally desirable". By 1976 a revision of the Department's 'Manual of Advice on Assessment of Teachers and Evaluation of Schools' was able to state clearly that "the principal and staff will formulate aims and objectives particular to the school and keep them regularly under review". (Schools Commission, 1978: 2)

Official plans for the future entail greater devolution of decision-making to schools themselves - again as part of a continuing process. However, attempts to establish formal structures for greater parent/teacher participation in decision-making have not been successful. Proposals by the Minister for Education, in January 1975, to establish a voluntary system of school councils with limited powers and predetermined parent, teacher and principal representation, met with almost total opposition.

5.2.2 Curriculum

The 'Three-Tier System'. Curriculum policy for the Department is enunciated in a statement recently issued by the Director-General. The following quotation from this statement best summarizes the situation:

> ...the Centre is seen as an agency determining policy and providing related services. The Regional Office is seen as an essential link between the School and the Centre: this does not deny the initiatives it should take in relation to local activity. Within the framework

> of central statements and supported by both Centre and Region the School develops and implements a curriculum appropriate to its pupils. (N.S.W. Department of Education, 1977: 1)

In some respects this policy statement recognizes existing trends which have been developing for some time, as reflected in three publications from the Department: the "Aims of Secondary Education" (1973), the "Base Paper on the Total Curriculum" (1975), and the "Aims of Primary Education" (1977).

General Curriculum Objectives. The system aims of education are formulated by the Department for consideration and approval by the Minister for Education. In secondary education aims are developed in association with two statutory bodies: The Board of Senior School Studies and the Secondary Schools Board. More specific curriculum objectives stated in official syllabuses and curriculum statements are determined by syllabus committees of the two Study Boards. Curriculum objectives at school level are supposed to be formulated by the principal and staff, in general accord with system aims and curriculum statements, and are supposed to be adapted specifically to meet the needs of the community in which the school is located.

Syllabus Construction: Flexibility for Schools. Highly detailed syllabuses are no longer extant. With the exception of certain texts prescribed for external examination purposes in English, Foreign Languages and History there is no specification of textbooks. The growing trend for centrally produced syllabuses to be broad in scope and relatively brief in size allows, in theory, considerable flexibility at the school level. The official view is that the elimination of the external examination at the end of Year 10, the issue of the Base Paper and the encouragement of the Secondary Schools Board is stimulating innovation and variety in curriculum patterns in the first four years of secondary education. It is claimed that in Years 11 and 12 the restructured curriculum, in particular the introduction of "Other Approved Studies", has introduced more flexibility in catering for pupil needs and interests.

Curriculum Change. The formal decision to revise sections of the secondary curriculum is made by the Statutory Boards. In that central curriculum statements provide only a broad framework, however, there is supposed to be considerable participation in curriculum at the school level as the principal and staff develop the details of a curriculum appropriate to each school. Furthermore, efforts have been made recently to increase the involvement of teachers in the development of central curriculum statements.

Supervision of the Curriculum. Schools are asked by the Department to evaluate their educational programmes in the context of system aims, objectives, and policies. The evaluation is supposed to be conducted by the principal and staff and be kept under regular review. The official view is that there is appropriate consultation with inspectors and the regional director as needs arise, and that the regional office ensures a flow of appropriate advice to and from the Centre. Until 1977 an appraisal of each school occurred at least once in every six years. An appraisal is conducted by a panel of inspectors and is supposed to be preceded by a number of inspector-staff consultations. It is recognised that the existence of the Higher School Certificate exercises considerable control over the curriculum for Years 11 and 12. To a lesser extent this applies at the junior secondary level in the subjects of English and mathematics which are moderated for the School Certificate.

Support and Advisory Services. The official view is that support for school-based curriculum is increasing. Advisory and information services are available from the centrally based Directorate of Studies and from the increasing numbers of advisers and consultants attached to regional offices. Many development courses for school executives now include a component of curriculum development and In-Service Branch, in collaboration with the Directorate of Studies, is developing a pilot course on curriculum development at the school level. There is a small but steady increase in curriculum support materials developed in regions. It is planned by the Centre that there will be:

(a) adequate central staff available to undertake curriculum research, development and evaluation;

(b) greater co-ordination of all agencies and personnel concerned with curriculum;

(c) an emphasis on improved communication and increased dialogue between Centre and Region;

(d) adequate curriculum in-service and research staff at regional level;

(e) increased opportunities for the development of teacher skills in curriculum development procedures, for the strengthening of teacher abilities to select, adapt and create curriculum materials, and for strengthening skills in interpersonal and intergroup processes;

(f) continued involvement of increasing numbers of practising teachers in devising the 'formal' curriculum;

(g) facilitating the exchange of ideas between schools through the activities of teachers' centres and 'clusters' of co-operating schools. (Schools Commission, 1978: 10)

5.3 VICTORIA (Vic.)

5.3.1 General Policies and Trends

In terms of official organisational action, two events mark the beginning of curriculum reform in Victoria: the establishment of the Curriculum Advisory Board and the activities of the Education Department's Curriculum Project (Hannan, 1970). Mr. R. Reed, then Director of Secondary Education, suggested the establishment of the Curriculum Advisory Board in a letter to schools and organisations in May 1966. The letter defined the purpose of the Board as being "to examine the first four years of secondary education and to define the principles on which organisation, curriculum, procedure and assessment should be based". It was never intended that the Board should be an authority determining curriculum and courses of study. This was made quite clear in the original letter: "The application of these principles, as established by the Curriculum Advisory Board, to individual schools would be a matter for the schools themselves". In 1967 the Board developed a set of general principles for the first four years of secondary education.

From September 1-6 in 1968, a seminar on the secondary school curriculum was held at Burwood Teachers' College (Hannan, 1970; Reed, 1970). The seminar, attended by fifty-three teachers, seven group leaders and several visitors and consultants, was organised to prepare a set of principles or objectives for secondary education which an individual school could use as a basis for developing a curriculum suited to its own needs. The Seminar presented eight recommendations to the Director-General, the first of which had particular relevance for the issue of curriculum autonomy:

> There should be no external examinations -VUSEB or Departmental. There should be no externally prescribed courses of study. Teachers should be fully responsible for curricula. (Cited by Hannan, 1970: 5)

To Mr. Reed, the Burwood Seminar was part of a curriculum project which was to continue for the next two years. In 1968 he drew the statements of the Curriculum Advisory Board and the principles of the Burwood Seminar together into a single statement of principles, which schools would adopt as the basis for evolving their own programmes. By then, three schools were already widely known among teachers for having changed either their curricula or their methods of working. All three of these schools were visited by thousands of teachers, and the beginning of 1969 saw at least thirty schools with some major change in operation. By 1970 "General Studies" could be described as a significant movement in itself, quite apart from other innovations being made under other titles (Hannan, 1970).

The Education Department now encourages devolution of decision-making to the regional and school level in most areas with the exception of teacher appointments. The school council is the formal agency for school level decision-making with powers that are specified in the Education (Schools Councils) Act, 1975. However, numerous opportunities are also available for participation by various groups, e.g., council sub-committees, parents' clubs, staff meetings and social clubs. Subject and form-level committees, School Aptitude Assessment Panels and Special Duties Allowances Committees also operate at the secondary level. School-based in-service educational programmes also function. Community use of school buildings is a matter for school councils.

5.3.2 Curriculum

General Curriculum Objectives. The system aims are formulated by the Department for consideration by the Director-General and ultimate approval by the Minister for Education. The Victorian Universities Schools Examination Board (V.U.S.E.B.) operates in the secondary area for Year 12 only. Subject committees may also exercise considerable influence on curriculum objectives. At school level objectives are supposed to be formulated in general accord with system aims by the principal alone or in consultation with staff, or by the school council.

Syllabus Construction and Specification of Textbooks. The official view is that this is mainly carried out by subject co-ordinators and teachers. However, important influences are: the V.U.S.E.B. for Year 12; national curriculum committees such as NCSST and CDC in the production of resource materials such as SEMP and ASEP; and state curriculum development units such as the Special Education Units, Curriculum and Research Branch, and Music Branch. In addition, the Secondary Board publishes in the Education Gazette a list of recommended textbooks, which may come from subject inspectors influenced by subject associations and standing committees.

Curriculum Change. In each school this is supposed to be the responsibility of the principal, together with subject co-ordinators, teachers and consultants. However, indirect influences come through subject associations, specialist branches (e.g., Music Branch) and national project committees. In the case of technical schools a Standing Committee controls any changes.

Supervision of the Curriculum. The process of evaluating and reporting upon a school is known as a school review. Inspectors are primarily responsible for a review, but a group of persons may be convened to act as a Board of Review. Review Boards in secondary schools often include teachers, parents, academics and community representation.

Support and Advisory Services. Standing Committees produce curriculum guidelines; district and regional consultants work with teachers in selecting, adapting and developing detailed programmes and in conducting in-service education activities; Curriculum and Research Branch produces curriculum materials; the Curriculum Advisory Board produces curriculum discussion papers and provides some consultancy services. Curriculum materials are produced by subject associations and CDC.

Planned Future Developments. The Victorian Institute of Secondary Education has been established to deal with the question of transition from school to work or further study. One of the issues under consideration is the future of the Higher School Certificate. The Curriculum Services Enquiry Report, released in 1977, recommended on structures for professional support services at school, district, regional and central levels.

5.4 QUEENSLAND (Qld.)

5.4.1 General Policies and Trends

Policy decisions continue to be made at the Head Office of the Department, with the ultimate responsibility in the hands of the Director-General. However, many administrative decisions are made at regional level by the Regional Director; this is particuarly so of appointment and transfer of staff.

In Queensland the beginning of devolution of responsibility to the school level is evident. Over recent years there has been a tendency to provide grants to schools for purchase of books, materials and equipment to suit individual school needs. Moreover, since the Education Act the final responsibility and power to make decisions in each school now rests with the principal. Although there have been statements made by Departmental officers encouraging principals to exercise their powers, whether or not they do so rests very much with the individual. There is no formal requirement that the principal consult teachers or parents before making decisions, although, once again, there has been encouragement from the Department to do this. It is recognised officially that, as personalities and leadership styles vary, so does the amount of consultation that operates in various schools.

Many principals, however, acting on their own initiative, or in response to pressures from their particular environment have agreed to the formation of a variety of informal groups variously known as boards, advisory councils, committees. These are usually representative of staff and parents and sometimes students. The degree of decision-making power varies as does the type of decision which these groups may make.

5.4.2 Curriculum

Determination of Broad Guidelines. Responsibility for the development of broad curriculum guidelines at the secondary level rests with the Board of Secondary School Studies, which is a Statutory Board with wide representation. Subject area committees of the Board develop proposals for its approval. Within the broad guidelines determined by the Board, schools are supposed to be free to develop their own programmes. To maintain standards and comparability of assessment across schools, however, a statewide system of moderation operates.

Supervision of the Curriculum. It is Departmental policy that inspectors of schools should visit schools on a regular basis and discuss curriculum matters. Many primary and secondary schools are supposed to be participating in co-operative evaluation techniques which involve total staffs, with inspectors acting as resource people, in a process of evaluating all facets of the school and determining remedial action where necessary. Reports on schools are supposed to be returned at regular intervals to the Director-General of Education.

Support and Advisory Services. To provide curriculum support in both primary and secondary schools, advisory teachers who specialise in particular subject areas are attached to the nine Regional Offices and visit schools on request. In addition, the Department's Curriculum Branch produces curriculum papers and other documents which are distributed on a teacher or school basis.

5.5 SOUTH AUSTRALIA (S.A.)

5.5.1 General Policies and Trends

The granting of more freedom to secondary schools in curriculum began as early as 1968, when there was a movement away from prescription to advisory notes and guidelines, as recommended in Circular 33:68 (Education Department of South Australia, 1976: Appendix I). However, the most significant expression of policy was contained in the following extracts from a memorandum entitled "Freedom and Authority in Schools", addressed to Heads of Departmental Schools in 1970 by the then Director-General:

> ...Within the broad framework of the Education Act, the general curriculum advised by the curriculum boards and approved by me as Director-General of Education, and the general policy set by the Director of your Division and communicated to you by circular, you have the widest liberty to vary courses, to alter the time-table, to decide the organisation of the school and government within the school, to experiment with teaching methods, assessment of student achievement and in extra-curricular activities.
>
> ...In exercising your authority and freedom to run your school as you think fit, of necessity you must have the backing of your staff. Without their support and participation and their adequate preparation, any departures from tradition will have little chance of success.

> Just as you have professional freedom and delegated authority, so too the same privileges should be extended to your staff, who in turn must accept your ultimate authority in the school and the stake that parents and students have in what goes on in the schools.
>
> Staff members will more readily follow a course of action if they have been taken into confidence and have shared in formulating the policy. They will be less effective and less enthusiastic if they feel that communication is all one way and their voices are not heard. (Jones, 1977: 5)

Another memo to principals and staff of all S.A. government schools from the Director-General sets out "Purposes of Schools". These two documents form the charter on which schools are operated, in terms of the legal responsibility laid upon the Director-General in the Education Act of 1972 (Education Department of South Australia, 1976: 11). To ensure that parents and the community would have an opportunity of directly participating in shaping school policy, the old regulations relating to parent bodies were revoked following the recommendations of the Committee of Enquiry into Education in South Australia (Karmel Report, 1971). The new regulations, "Part IV - School Councils and Affiliated Organizations", required councils to have a maximum of 19 members (with parents constituting more than half) and brought about changes in council roles. Clauses 1, 2 and 5 spell out generally the major changes in the council's role, namely to exercise a general oversight over the well-being of the school, to advise on the correlation between the work of the school and the educational needs of the district, and to consider in broad outline the general education policy within the school. However, regulations do not give the council authority to force the principal to take any action.

5.5.2 Curriculum

Introduction. The Freedom and Authority Memorandum cited above invites school communities to develop and organise their own curriculum. However, the statement also suggests certain constraints which are in the main related to the agreed purposes of schools, the University-controlled external examination at the Year 12 level, and the wishes of parents and employers.

Why School-Based Curriculum? This is seen by the S.A. system to be a good thing for four major reasons. First, it enables a school to react sensitively to the needs of its community (ethnic, aboriginal, high SES, rural, etc.); second, it is politic in an era of an increase in the demand by teachers for self-determination to propose school-based curriculum; third, it increases the professionalism of teachers; and fourth, it is likely to result in better teaching as people "make the curriculum their own". The official view adopted is that SBCD should be approved by the school community as a whole, if only managed by particular individuals. The process is supposed to be handled by a curriculum development group in a school, led by a deputy principal, or several schools can join forces so that a curriculum development "consortium" emerges.

Supervision of the Curriculum. It is seen as important by the Department that the curriculum developed at the school level be given the seal of good housekeeping by an authoritative group. At the centre in South Australia, this imprimatur is given by the Director-General of Education by virtue of his powers under Section 82 of the Education Act. At the school level, it is currently being suggested that the School Council be given this responsibility, subject to the final veto of the principal and the umpiring role of the administration.

Support for School-Based Curriculum Development.

> Schools, both primary and secondary, are having bother in achieving anything significant in curriculum development. If education systems are to take the matter seriously, then school systems will need adequate support. (Schools Commission, 1978: 76)

This statement indicates official recognition of the need for support in SBCD; three main kinds of support are seen by administrators to be essential. First, schools will need time to meet as whole staffs, or as faculty groups, or in various other groupings. Relief teachers of various kinds, or school closure will therefore be required. Second, teachers will need new skills. The Department releases teachers to study curriculum development and design at Sturt College of Advanced Education and this is slowly building up skilled people. Third, schools will require adequate physical support in the way of printing, publication, sampling and testing, as well as support from consultants and advisers of various kinds.

> School-based curriculum development is unlikely to flourish significantly in South Australia, if only because of inadequate support. There are some isolated examples of fine work, and most schools have had success with minor modifications and adoptions. Certainly, no school feels compelled to follow the centrally produced curriculum. Nonetheless it is considered that the state of affairs in school-based curriculum development is such as to suggest that well-produced and detailed curriculum should continue to be produced centrally and distributed. One of the major decisions a school must make is the extent to which this central production should be used. (Schools Commission, 1978: 77)

5.6 WESTERN AUSTRALIA (W.A.)

5.6.1 General Policies and Trends

The Education Department has implemented a State government decentralisation policy by creating regional offices in eight rural regions and four metropolitan regions. Each office is staffed with two or three superintendents, an education officer, advisory teachers and clerical staff. The fundamental principles guiding this devolution of decision-making are:

> (a) that decisions are more effectively made in the light of local circumstances;
>
> (b) that the persons affected by a decision should participate in making the decision;
>
> (c) that the Minister for Education remains responsible for the education system, irrespective of who makes the decisions; and
>
> (d) that the public are entitled to demand accountability for the funds expended and the outcomes achieved. (Schools Commission, 1978: 98)

The official Departmental view is that, for many years, school principals have been responsible for decisions regarding internal school organisation and the use of resources, for the raising and expending of school amenities funds, and for local modifications of the curriculum. The major changes being undertaken in recent years have been:

> (a) to give regional superintendents greater control over minor works, in-service education programmes, and advisory services; and
>
> (b) to give school principals greater control over the curriculum and local expenditure from the Central Revenue Fund. (Schools Commission, 1978: 99)

Indeed, under the Education Act Regulations, the principal is responsible for all decisions made in the school. It is claimed that, in recent years, principals have been encouraged to involve the teaching staff in school-based decision-making. In many larger schools, principals have established school councils with representatives of both teachers and parents, and in some high schools students also.

School councils are purely advisory bodies, and are not at present covered by the Education Act Regulations. Under the Regulations parents and citizens' associations are expressly prohibited from interfering in the determination of curriculum, in the management of the school or in staffing matters. At present, the legal position of school councils is being considered with a view to regularising their existence and functioning.

5.6.2 Curriculum

General Curriculum Objectives. For secondary schools these are determined by the Board of Secondary Education. Each of its syllabus committees consists of a superintendent as chairperson and teachers, all expert in the particular subject area. Detailed syllabi are prepared by education officers in the Curriculum Branch under the supervision of Syllabus Committee Chairmen. The syllabi are mainly presented as syllabus materials (textbooks and other resources) which schools are supposed to use as they see fit, within the limitations imposed by regional superintendents. It is Departmental policy that proposals for change may arise from any level of the system and be considered by the syllabus committees. Superintendents are supposed to visit schools at least twice a year in order to supervise the educational process. Advisory teachers also visit schools to offer advice and assistance.

School-Based Curriculum Development. This is recognized to require considerable resources and it is official policy to proceed fairly cautiously while at the same time encouraging local modifications of the curriculum. In-service education courses are being offered to assist in the development of the necessary expertise amongst teachers. Individual schools may propose their own optional subjects and formulate their syllabi for approval by the Board. The official view is that this option has proved particularly beneficial in providing alternative programmes for Year 11 students.

5.7 TASMANIA (Tas.)

5.7.1 General Policies and Trends

A recent re-organisation within the Education Department has led to the appointment of a Director of Schools and Colleges. Assisting the Director are three deputy directors particularly responsible for primary, secondary and technical and further education. The position of Regional Director was created in January 1970 in the north and north west of Tasmania and was extended to the south in September, 1973. It is claimed that this organisation has resulted in more personalised administration, with the increased accessibility of schools to a Regional Director who is authorised to make local decisions and interpret local aspirations and needs.

At this stage the majority of schools are supposed to have a statement of philosophy in the form of general aims, followed by an outline of more specific aims and an indication of how the aims will be achieved to the best advantage of the school population. According to administrators, it is usual for the principal and staff to spend a considerable amount of time in the development of a realistic policy which, if not developed with the assistance of parent representatives, is made available to parents and the community for information and further development.

It is claimed that School Parents and Friends' Associations have in recent years begun to take a much more active role in education activities, due to the provision of more generous government funding to schools which has largely relieved associations of this burden. Although no formal arrangement has been made, it is generally expected that Parents and Friends' bodies play a significant part in the development of school policies and the utilisation of funding available to schools. It is not uncommon for Parents and Friends' bodies to financially assist schools on projects in conjunction with Schools Commission funds.

5.7.2 Curriculum

General Curriculum Objectives. In secondary education objectives are determined by syllabus committees of the Schools Board. A general framework has been established by major periodic reviews such as the School in Society Committee or the Committee on Secondary Education. A firm proposal that has been made for the future is the establishment of a Standing Committee on Education which would consider general objectives on a continuing basis.

Syllabus Construction. In lower secondary (Years 7 to 10), syllabi are constructed by schools working towards end-points set out in the general statements. This also applies with all levels at H.S.C. (Years 11 and 12), except for Level III where external examination syllabi are provided. In lower secondary textbooks are specified by schools. At H.S.C. Level III, texts are prescribed for some subjects and recommended for others. There is no State prescription or purchasing of books for schools.

Except in the external examination area, a good deal of flexibility is supposedly provided and used at school level. The appropriate official term is "suggestion" and not "prescription" and, in fact, it is recognised that there are considerable variations between schools in relation to content, emphasis, sequence and so on. Some schools tend to use books and programmed material from commercial publishers and this may tend to reduce their flexibility. Schools can develop courses of their own, but need to have these approved by the Schools Board if they are to be included on the Board's School Certificate. Subjects outside this approved area for certification tend to be peripheral. A survey of all Tasmanian secondary schools found an enormous variety in such subjects and courses, with an average of about 10 per cent of students' time spent on them. Some schools are supposed to be in the process of developing curricula at school level (except in Maths and English), and consequently are tending to underwrite their own certification.

Curriculum change. It is Departmental policy that a variety of people, including groups such as subject associations, groups of teachers, the Curriculum Branch, or individual schools, decide whether some sections of the curriculum should be changed. Schools Board Committees and Regional Moderation Committees, at either School Certificate or Higher School Certificate level, play an important role in this area. It is claimed that teachers and representatives of other interested groups participate in the development of new curricula. Until recently, at secondary level, the Schools Board apparently did not take any initiatives itself but responded to initiatives coming from the school, a subject association, etc.

Supervision of the Curriculum. At lower secondary level there is a moderation scheme where peer groups of teachers carry out the process and discuss, for example, the provision of a curriculum related to defined end-points. Supervisors of subjects frequently initiate circumstances to permit exchange of ideas and interpretation of curriculum direction. Moderation consultants also participate in this process. At Higher School Certification Level III there is an external examination so the question of supervision does not arise. At other H.S.C. levels there are subject advisers, appointed by the Schools Board, who confer with the school about particular courses.

Support and Advisory Services. Support is supposed to be available from subject supervisors and consultants seconded from schools, from teachers' development programmes and the information service established within the Directorate of Services, from the Curriculum Branch, and from groups such as the Innovations Committee and Priority Schools Committee who are related to Schools Commission programmes.

Planned Future Developments. A general progression towards school-based curriculum development within guidelines provided for all schools is planned by the Department for the future. Curriculum development is officially seen as a co-operative activity involving schools and other groups such as the State Curriculum Centre and the C.D.C. In this respect an important initiative in 1977 was an investigation by the Curriculum Branch through task forces to establish the support needs for school-based curriculum development.

5.8 AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY (A.C.T.)

5.8.1 General Policies and Trends

In 1971 the Commonwealth Department of Education brought forward a planning proposal for secondary colleges to provide education for A.C.T. students in Forms 5 and 6 (now Years 11 and 12). A committee, formed to consider this proposal, subsequently recommended that:

> secondary education in the A.C.T. be restructured, in ways to be further specified, along the lines of four year high schools and colleges...and that...both schools and colleges be encouraged to assume a greater degree of autonomy than at present to devise, within broad accepted educational objectives, their own particular goals, structures and curricula. (Campbell Report, 1973: 115)

Reports and documents published after the Campbell Report supported its recommendations (e.g., the Hughes Report, 1973). On September 11 1973, it was announced that an interim A.C.T. Schools Authority would be formed to administer education from January 1, 1974. The N.S.W.

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Department of Education thus relinquished control of A.C.T. schools. In "Guidelines on Relationships within the Education System", distributed in 1974 by the Schools Authority, the policy of autonomy was reaffirmed:

> It is the firm intention of the Authority that schools within the A.C.T. system of education will have the freedom and the responsibility to develop their own curricula within the guidelines set out in this paper. (A.C.T. Schools Authority, 1974: 16)

On January 1 1977, the A.C.T. Schools Authority became an independent statutory authority. This body is comprised of one full-time and fourteen part-time members, responsible directly to the Minister for Education. The full-time member is the Chief Education Officer, who is supported by a central administrative and professional staff. Sections 38 and 39 of the Schools Authority Ordinance set out the functions and powers of school boards, which are designed to ensure the right of interested groups to participate in decision-making at the school level.

5.8.2 Curriculum

General Curriculum Objectives. Within a broad framework of aims and principles determined by the Schools Authority, school boards are responsible for determining general curriculum objectives. Teaching staff are supposed to play an important role in preparing recommendations and providing guidance for boards on schools' curriculum objectives.

Syllabus Construction. Detailed syllabi are prepared by teaching staff within the general framework outlined above. Teachers involved in planning and administering particular aspects of a school's educational programme are responsible for determining what textbooks and collateral resource material are required. At the secondary college level, assurances as to the availability of appropriate resources and materials are necessary for particular courses to be accredited and this approach is becoming more common at other levels. Schools are supposed to have a high degree of flexibility in determining curriculum objectives and specific syllabus content, as well as a large measure of freedom in attaching priority to particular aspects of the educational programme.

Curriculum Change. School boards have formal responsibility for determining when some sections of the curriculum should be changed. In considering such questions, the board supposedly relies upon the advice of the principal and teaching staff. The Schools Authority is responsible for the allocation of resources on a system-wide basis and, consequently, has the power to influence directly curriculum options by its resource allocation policy.

The official view is that teaching staff at individual schools play a major part in the development of a new curricula. It is claimed, however, that it is customary for the Authority's curriculum consultants, parents and interested members of the community to be involved and for curriculum experts from outside the school system to be co-opted. Professional teacher associations are also supposed to be influential in establishing climates of opinion which provide the basis for specific curriculum or syllabus change. Curriculum is not developed in the A.C.T. on a system-wide basis, but the Schools Authority finances the preparation and distribution of curriculum materials in fields where insufficient resources or expertise at the individual school level exist. The Schools Authority approves educational programmes of high schools catering for Years 7 to 10. Courses for Years 11 and 12, for which recognition for tertiary admission is required, must be submitted to the A.C.T. Schools Accrediting Agency. This Agency makes use of expert panels to evaluate course proposals, in terms of level and appropriateness of content and the availability of the necessary resources to permit the courses to be taught satisfactorily.

Supervision of the Curriculum. At present no formal mechanism of supervision of curriculum operates. Informal devices such as frequent visits to schools by consultants and field liaison staff and feedback from teacher development activities are supposed to provide means whereby school curricula may be monitored by the Schools Authority. Models for the evaluation of schools' educational programmes and the effectiveness with which they are achieving their specified curriculum aims and objectives are currently under consideration at school and system level.

Support and Advisory Services. The Curriculum Branch of the Authority's office is responsible for the provision of support services to schools in curriculum development activities. The functions of its three sections are summarised below:

a) Education Programmes Section - develops and administers the registration and approval procedures; develops and operates programmes to promote school-based curriculum development; initiates and participates in staff development programmes associated with curriculum planning and evaluation.

b) Curriculum Advice Section - develops policies and provides advice on courses, equipment, building standards and materials; provides assistance to teachers in the selection and development of curriculum materials and the introduction of appropriate teaching methodologies; initiates and participates in staff development programmes; provides advisory and consultant services in special areas of education.

c) Curriculum Resources Section - develops policies and provides an advisory service on the use of educational media; evaluates technical and educational aspects of audio-visual materials; co-ordinates the development of multi-media curriculum materials; develops and maintains a central professional lending library service; provides information services; plans, establishes and operates regional resource centres.

Planned Future Developments. Consideration is being given to system-wide educational priorities, important amongst which is the expansion of support services for school-based curriculum development activities (e.g., in central library resources and educational media fields). A school-based initiative to which system support is being provided is the development of effective articulation of educational programmes over the entire Kindergarten to Year 12 continuum. Attention is also being given to developing greater flexibility for individual schools to determine priorities in the allocation of resources (finance, personnel, accommodation), in line with priorities established within their educational programmes.

5.9 NORTHERN TERRITORY (N.T.)

5.9.1 General Policies and Trends

Over the years responsibility for education in the Northern Territory has been given to a number of different departments. Immediately prior to the establishment of the current system, schools in the predominantly European communities were serviced, on behalf of the Commonwealth, by the Education Department of South Australia. Those in the predominantly Aboriginal centres were controlled by the Education Branch of the Department of the Interior. In 1973, education became the responsibility of the N.T. Division of the Commonwealth Department of Education while the provision of teachers, their conditions of service and promotional opportunities became the responsibility of the Commonwealth Teaching Service.

At present in the Northern Territory there are no clearly defined parameters that indicate the limits of school-based decision-making. The official view is that wherever possible decisions should be made by a broadly based group of people who reflect the needs of the local community. The limits on the extent to which decision-making has become the responsibility of the school have apparently not been tested or defined. There is, however, the official acceptance that decision-making should not be centralised. Such an attitude is reinforced by the present efforts by the Northern Territory to expand the role of the Regional Offices.

Some decision-making powers in a number of schools have been delegated to bodies which have representation from parents, staff and students:

> (a) School Governing Councils have been developed in most secondary schools, though few are in evidence in primary schools. Governing Councils in secondary schools have varying degrees of parent representation, but as a rule this is less than staff representation.
>
> (b) School Committees in line with the Schools Committee Ordinance operate in most primary schools and some secondary schools. Parents are in the majority - such a committee 'acts as a Senate rather than a House of Representatives'.
>
> (c) Boards of Studies exist in most secondary schools. Composition generally includes representation from the staff, parents and students. These boards have been designed specifically to advise in the area of curriculum development. (Schools Commission, 1978: 158)

The proliferation of these bodies is seen officially as an outcome of encouragement and guidelines from the Division. However, at the present time there is no legislation that enables such arrangements to have any legal standing. As a result, the interpretation of the guidelines provided by the Division depends to a large extent on the individual principal. It is claimed that many principals apparently feel that since ultimate responsibility is theirs, the ultimate authority in the school situation should also be theirs. Thus they reserve the right to veto decisions made by groups or by other individuals.

5.9.2 *Curriculum*

General Curriculum Objectives. Within broad guidelines which may be determined from time to time by the N.T. Division of the Department of Education, each school is supposed to be responsible for the curriculum it offers. Except in junior and middle secondary years the N.T. Division supplies guidelines. Normally, Schools' Councils or Boards of Studies will determine school policy guidelines. In smaller schools these may be determined by the principal, generally with staff and occasionally with parents as well. Positions in the Commonwealth Teaching Service are supposed to entail some degree of responsibility for curriculum development. Curriculum committees have been established for seven broad areas of education for all levels. They are supposed to be co-ordinating and advisory in nature. Membership includes teachers, curriculum advisers and members of the community.

Syllabus Construction. It is claimed that this is mainly carried out by schools. Initiatives may come from advisers and workshops with visiting specialists. Guidelines and syllabuses are available from the N.T. Division and in some cases South Australian and Western Australian syllabuses are also recommended. In Years 11 and 12, some courses are prescribed by the South Australian Public Examinations Board. Courses other than these, if they are to be used in the School Leavers' Certificate, are required by the N.T. Division to be registered, and must meet prescribed standards of planning and documentation. The N.T. Division has the power to revise sections of the curriculum, but it is claimed that in practice changes are usually initiated by schools.

Supervision of the Curriculum. Supervision is supposed to be exercised informally, through the peer assessment procedures of the Commonwealth Teaching Service. At senior secondary level, the Course Registration Committee exercises informal supervision through contact and communication with schools, in the same way as do the advisers.

Support and Advisory Services. An "integrated curriculum development advisory, media and in-service support system operates". (Schools Commission, 1978: 159) All are devised to respond to teacher initiatives in the main, although Divisional and community initiatives are possible and both do occur. The Media Centre supplies support via the usual range of audio-visual services. Teachers involved in curriculum development are supposed to have opportunities to attend in-service courses and to visit other schools. Consultants are brought from interstate and may participate in workshops or school visits.

School-based Curriculum: An Assessment. The official view is that almost unlimited flexibility to schools is allowed. It is claimed that the only formal limits in secondary schools are those imposed by the existence of the P.E.B. Matriculation exams, which tend to dictate curriculum in Year 11 as well as Year 12. However, schools can supposedly find a way round this restraint through the introduction of alternative internal courses. It is recognized that the degree to which this flexibility is used varies. The following specific facts demonstrating freedom for schools are cited by officials:

> (a) The essence of bilingual education is local participation and responsibility.
>
> (b) An extensive repertoire of non-tertiary preparatory Year 11 and 12 courses has now been registered.
>
> (c) The newly created Curriculum Committees in some cases are experiencing grave role definition problems - unlikely to occur in a prescriptive system perhaps. Although other explanations are possible, it seems that lack of authority to prescribe is the problem.
>
> (d) Demands for advisory and support services have increased dramatically (a feature of school-based systems).
>
> (e) The Director has issued one prescriptive curriculum circular in the last three years - Oral English will be taught to Aboriginal students, from the recommended syllabus unless a more suitable one is locally devised. (Schools Commission, 1978: 160)

At the same time, it is recognized officially that several problems have developed from the granting of curriculum autonomy:

> (a) Too many teachers simply import their home state or previous school courses.
>
> (b) Many courses are so highly personalised as to be non-transferable between teachers and to create problems for transferring children.
>
> (c) Complete sets of Divisional guidelines are hard to find and difficult to keep in print.
>
> (d) More 'positive and definitive' leadership is often requested by schools and increasingly after four years School-Based Curriculum Development. (Schools Commission, 1978: 161)

5.10 COMPARISON OF 'OFFICIAL' STATEMENTS WITH TEACHER PERCEPTIONS

The descriptions provided above indicate that, in recent years, all states and territories in Australia have made significant moves towards increasing school-based decision-making, particularly in the area of curriculum. Nevertheless, there is not a uniform pattern across Australia. From the documentary evidence reviewed, it seems that this devolution of authority for curriculum has reached an advanced stage only in the A.C.T., the Northern Territory and Victoria. In the other states, by comparison, there is still official concern with maintaining central prescriptions for curriculum. Official statements may not, of course, describe what is actually happening in schools. To determine more confidently the extent of curriculum autonomy available to teachers in different states, one needs to examine empirical evidence gathered from the schools themselves. Unfortunately only three Australian studies have collected such data (Simpkins,1972; Barnes, 1979; Grassie, 1979).

Simpkins(1972) studied the perceptions and preferences of 89 secondary teachers and 97 primary teachers drawn from N.S.W. state schools. Three decision-making sources were identified: (a) the individual teacher; (b) the formal staff group; and (c) administration, from the principal upward. There was substantial agreement amongst teachers surveyed that the individual teacher played the primary role in classroom management (e.g., teaching methods, testing), while the formal staff group and those in administration were seen to play secondary roles. It was also generally agreed that the individual teacher played a secondary role in deciding matters external to classroom management, including determination of the basic outline and detailed content of the curriculum. However, teachers were divided in opinions as to who undertook the prime role in selecting texts and curriculum material.

With regard to preferences, Simpkins' (1972) data suggested that teachers desired decision-making involvements to vary substantially with the nature of the task, with the pattern of variation differing sharply from that which they perceived in their schools. They agreed that the individual teacher should play the major role in deciding classroom matters and that the formal staff group should prevail in matters of school organization. They disagreed as to the decision source which should exercise primary authority in curriculum matters, with preferences evenly distributed among the three decision sources. However, in spite of this difference of opinion, a substantial proportion of the test group expressed a desire for some form of direct teacher participation in decision-making on curriculum matters. Finally, it should be noted that the pattern of responses which characterized the perceptions and preferences of the group as a whole also characterized the responses of primary and secondary teachers as sub-groups.

In a similar study but on a smaller scale, Barnes (1979) surveyed the teachers and principals (n=55) of two Sydney metropolitan primary schools. The majority of staff from School A perceived that the curriculum was prescribed by the Department of Education. Their view was that the most effective curriculum decisions would be reached if prescribed by state and national bodies, and the least effective decisions would be reached if made by the school staff co-operatively working together. In contrast, the majority of staff from School R perceived that the school's curriculum decisions were currently being made by the teachers co-operatively working together and making individual decisions for themselves. For the most part, School R staff wanted to see curriculum decision-making continue in this way.

Perhaps the most important Australian data on teacher perceptions of curriculum autonomy has been collected by Grassie (1979). In 1977, Grassie sent a slightly amended form of the questionnaire originally used by Campbell (1975) to the 220 state schools surveyed in 1972 and to 80 schools in the Territories. Completed usable questionnaires were received from a total of 241 principals comprising 97 primary and 91 secondary school principals from state schools and 30 primary and 23 secondary school principals from territory schools. Principals were asked to indicate the most important body or person determining the syllabus or subject content of courses taught to students in the compulsory years of schools and in the years beyond the statutory leaving age. In 1972, 69% of the primary principals had no doubt it was the Education Department in the different States who made decisions for the compulsory years. In the secondary schools at that time the position was not so clear cut. In Western Australia and Queensland the secondary principals agreed with their primary colleagues, but in Victoria 35% saw the most important body being a committee of subject teachers in their schools. The national modal response for secondary schools was, however, a State or regional committee on which teachers were always represented (39%).

In 1977 these three modes - the Education Department, a State or regional committee with teacher representation, and a committee of subject teachers in the school - were still the responses of the major proportion of principals. The primary principals' modal response was the Education Department but the percentage at the mode had fallen from 69 to 37. The mode for all secondary principals was still the same - a State or regional committee - but again the percentage at the mode had dropped from 39 to 30. The percentage of Victorian secondary principals who saw in 1977 the main decision-making body being teachers in the school was 64%, nearly double the 1972 percentage. There had been a dramatic shift, too, in Queensland's secondary schools. Here the Education Department had been replaced by a State or regional committee on which teachers were always represented, according to 68% of the principals. The 1977 data also suggested that devolution to the schools may have gone further in the Territories than in the states (with the exception of Victoria). All of the people in the Territories, with one exception, against which percentages were entered, were in the schools - subject masters, committees of subject teachers and individual teachers. With regard to subject content for the years beyond compulsory attendance at school, decisions were generally made in both 1972 and 1977 by state or regional committees with teachers as members. The percentages at this mode varied in both years with the Tasmanian one in 1977 (24%) being the lowest and the N.S.W. one in 1977 (83%) being the highest. In the A.C.T. 31% of principals were of the opinion that groups of subject teachers made these decisions, thus indicating a greater extent of teacher involvement than elsewhere in Australia.

It is difficult to derive generalisations from three isolated studies, only one of which was Australia-wide. Nevertheless, there is certainly little evidence to support the case that decisions in the vital area of curriculum have been devolved fully on the schools across Australia. To some extent this is not surprising; the research is fairly consistent with conclusions drawn from the documentary evidence surveyed earlier in this chapter. That teachers are involved in curriculum development through membership of State or Regional Committees is quite clear. However, it seems that only in Victorian, A.C.T., and Northern Territory schools, do many teachers at the school level take the primary role in deciding the curriculum.

CHAPTER SIX

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

6.1 RATIONALE FOR THIS STUDY

The literature review, provided in chapters 2-5, documents a "movement" in which increased emphasis has been given in recent years to the professional role of the teacher and the school as a unit in making curriculum decisions. This has been most commonly called "the school-based curriculum development (SBCD) movement" or "the move towards increased curriculum autonomy". According to many curriculum "experts", there are definite benefits, as well as particular disadvantages/problems, associated with the granting of such freedom to schools. The advantages are considered by some experts to outweigh the disadvantages, but empirical evidence suggests that this may not necessarily be the case.

In Australia, this SBCD movement appears to have arisen through the combined influence of at least nine different factors, the most important of which has been the distribution of various reports and memoranda to schools by state and territory departments of education from the late 1960's and onwards. Such statements granted varying degrees of curriculum autonomy to schools and paved the way for different forms of SBCD. In this respect, the movement has been more a "democracy by decree" than a result of an upsurge of demand from the schools. Nevertheless, it is clear that the move towards curriculum autonomy is an important feature of the contemporary Australian educational scene.

Most of the opinions on this movement have been expressed by educational administrators and/or academics in "official" memoranda, reports, journal articles, books and conference papers. A review of these documents suggests that only in Victorian, A.C.T. and Northern Territory schools do many teachers at the school level take the primary role in deciding the curriculum. Little research has been conducted in this area, however, to determine the views of those at the "grass roots" level, namely, the teaching profession. Grassie's (1979) study of school principals, the only Australia-wide one, tended to support the picture derived from official statements. A need clearly exists for further investigation into teacher perceptions of curriculum autonomy in Australia.

There is no theoretical rationale, as such, for this research. However, three of Bronfenbrenner's ideal characteristics of educational studies are apposite to the discussion:

> (a) Our researches must be carried out in real-life educational settings and not be restricted to laboratory experiments.
>
> (b) The focus of research should be the relations between persons and their environments i.e. person-environment and environment-environment interactions.
>
> (c) "Provision must also be made for assessing each participant's *definition of the situation,* how he or she perceives the setting and its various elements. This is the requirement of *Phenomenological analysis*." (Bronfenbrenner, 1976: 8)

The general purpose of this study was thus to gather information concerning curriculum autonomy from school staffs across Australia. More specifically, three questions provided the focus for this exploratory research:

(a) How do school staffs interpret the term 'curriculum autonomy'? (meaning of curriculum autonomy)

(b) What do school staffs consider to be advantages or benefits of, as well as disadvantages of and limitations to, curriculum autonomy? (advantages/ disadvantages of curriculum autonomy)

(c) What is the extent of curriculum autonomy in schools across Australia, as perceived by school staffs? (extent of curriculum autonomy)

For *each* of the three issues raised above, a further set of more specific questions applied, namely: Are there differences of opinion within and across states? Are there differences of opinion among principals, heads of department and teachers - overall and within each state?

6.2 CONTEXT OF THIS STUDY

The information required was obtained from the data bank of an Australia-wide research study entitled "the Curriculum Action Project" (C.A.P.). This project was commenced late in 1976 by a Macquarie University team of researchers, with a parallel study being conducted at the University of Queensland. The studies were funded by the Education Research and Development Committee (E.R.D.C.), in collaboration with the Curriculum Development Centre (C.D.C.), both located in Canberra.

The aim of the Curriculum Action Project was to explore and develop understandings about curriculum decision-making processes as they take place in schools, with particular interest in the junior secondary school classes at Years 7-10. This level was chosen to reflect the priority identified by CDC in its Triennial Report , 1977-1979 (CDC, 1977: 8). Data concerning decision-making were sought through a two-pronged attack: a nation-wide mail questionnaire survey and a case-study. For the purposes of the study reported in this project data from the survey only were used.

This present study represented a detailed analysis of responses to two open-ended items included in the C.A.P. questionnaires, namely:

(a) "What do you understand by the phrase 'curriculum autonomy'?"
(b) "What does curriculum autonomy mean for you and your school?"

6.3 THE SAMPLE

Schools participating in the survey were selected by the Survey Section of the Australian Council for Educational Research (A.C.E.R.) in Melbourne. A stratified random sample based upon school size and socio-economic status of the school locality, and comprising twenty schools in each state and ten in the territories, was drawn. Permission of Directors-General of each State and Territory was sought, and readily received. Schools were invited to participate and principals were requested to supply lists of staff, indicating the names of teachers involved with Year 7-10 classes, and designating also the names of heads of department. From these lists, ten teachers and three heads of department were randomly selected from each participating school by a member of the C.A.P. team. They were then each sent a numbered questionnaire together with a personalised letter inviting participation. Questionnaires for participants at each school were mailed as a bundle addressed to the school principal, but each questionnaire was enclosed in a sealed, personally-addressed envelope. The questionnaires were designed to elicit information concerning many aspects of curriculum decision-making within the school. Trials had indicated that completion of the questionnaires would take between one and two hours.

Two major methods were adopted in an attempt to bolster response rates and encourage invitees to accept invitations to participate. In the first place, a media campaign was mounted throughout Australia to highlight the potential importance of the findings. A specially-prepared media release was mailed to press, radio and television outlets in capital cities and in catchment areas of selected schools. Secondly, because of the time (1-2 hours) required for participation by respondents, each school principal was requested to attempt to find released time for invitees or to otherwise compensate participants where this was feasible. Teachers in a parallel United States of America study were paid honoraria upon the return of completed questionnaires.

Although separate questionnaires were necessarily developed for the three groups of invitees, they contained many items common to all three forms. The appropriate numbered questionnaire - Form A (white) for teachers, Form B (yellow) for heads of department, and Form C (pink) for principals - was included with each invitation, together with a reply-paid addressed envelope for return of the completed questionnaire. Invitees were requested to respond by a designated date three weeks from the mailing date to each invitee. They were assured both of the confidentiality of the data, and of the provision of feedback to all participating schools.

The response rates of schools participating in the study (by state) and the response rates of respondents (by state and responsibilities) are shown in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 respectively. Clearly the response rate varied considerably across states and across different types of invitees. For example, the highest Australia-wide percentage return of questionnaires came from principals (73%) and the lowest from teachers (38%), with heads of department in-between (50%). Such variations limit the generalisability of the results to some extent.

A number of schools in the A.C.T. and Northern Territory were subsequently invited to participate. Four A.C.T. and two Northern Territory schools accepted. These schools provided additional data from 3 principals, 5 heads of departments and 26 teachers, providing a total sample of 586 respondents representing 98 schools throughout Australia.

6.4 PROCEDURES FOR THE CATEGORIZATION OF RESPONSES

6.4.1 Initial Reading of Responses

Two school bundles from each of the six states were randomly selected for initial reading, in order to gain a general "feeling" for the data and to draw up a set of trial categories for the interpretation/classification of responses. Three general aspects

TABLE 6.1 : RESPONSE RATE OF SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN STUDY, BY STATE

States	Base Number of Schools	Number of School Acceptances for Participation	
		N	Percentage of Original Base Number
N.S.W.	20	16	80%
Victoria	20	17	85%
Queensland	20	13	65%
South Australia	20	17	85%
Western Australia	18	12	67%
Tasmania	19	17	89%
TOTALS	117	92	79%

TABLE 6.2 : RESPONSE RATE OF RESPONDENTS, BY STATE AND RESPONSIBILITY

State	Number of Invitations Mailed			No. of Principals Providing Information About Participating School	Number of Respondents to Questionnaires (Percentage of Invitations Mailed)		
	Principals	Heads of Dept.	Teachers		Principals	Heads of Dept.	Teachers
N.S.W.	16	48	160	15 (94%)	9 (56%)	37 (77%)	56 (35%)
Vic.	17	51	170	17 (100%)	12 (71%)	17 (33%)	63 (37%)
Qld.	13	39	130	12 (92%)	10 (77%)	17 (44%)	37 (28%)
Sth. Aust.	17	51	170	16 (94%)	13 (76%)	23 (45%)	74 (44%)
W. Aust.	12	36	120	12 (100%)	10 (83%)	20 (56%)	56 (47%)
Tas.	17	51	170	16 (94%)	13 (76%)	25 (49%)	60 (35%)
TOTALS	92	276	920	88 (96%)	167 (73%)	139 (50%)	346 (38%)
		1288				552 (43%)	

of the data were gleaned from this initial reading.

First, it was apparent that each person's responses to the two questions concerning curriculum autonomy would have to be considered together as a set. This was because in many cases the interpretation of one answer was often made easier in the light of the second answer. Furthermore, a few respondents answered both questions within the space allocated to one; for example, some gave a definition for curriculum autonomy and then indicated the extent of curriculum autonomy at their school by simply saying - "see previous question".

Second, the initial reading indicated that there was an interesting variety of responses provoked by the two stimulus questions. Indeed, the range of answers suggested that, within limits, three different types of information could be obtained from respondents: (a) their understanding of the term 'curriculum autonomy'; (b) their views on the advantages or benefits of curriculum autonomy and on the disadvantages of and limitations to curriculum autonomy; and (c) the perceived extent of autonomy available at their school.

Third, there were limitations in terms of the length, written expression, scope and relevance of the various answers provided. This was due to the fact that the two stimulus questions were of a general nature and were also part of a set of eight open-ended questions. Thus while some people outlined several arguments, ideas or points of view, others simply gave their answer in a terse phrase. Respondents were presenting their own ideas spontaneously and were not responding to structured proposals, as in other parts of the C.A.P. questionnaire. Furthermore, the answers were self-reports by respondents of their perceptions of events and people, and so were inevitably influenced by the insights, attitudes and values of respondents.

6.4.2 Initial Categories of Analysis

From the initial reading four sets of categories were drawn up, as shown in Table 6.3. The categories in Set A were derived from the answers to the first question: "What do you understand by the phrase curriculum autonomy?" This was a direct question calling for the respondent's definition and/or interpretation of the term 'curriculum autonomy'. Categories in Sets B, C, and D

TABLE 6.3 : CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS INITIALLY USED BY RESEARCHER -

---

A. *The Meaning of Curriculum Autonomy*

1. The school/teachers have freedom to determine the curriculum/school-based curriculum development.

   Subcategory 1 - Respondents provided no further amplification.

   Subcategory 2 - Reference to the curriculum meeting local needs and conditions.

   Subcategory 3 - Reference to freedom from "outside" interference/control.

2. Idiosyncratic answers, but implied "correct" understanding of curriculum autonomy.
3. Idiosyncratic answers, with implied "incorrect" understanding of curriculum autonomy.
4. No answer/don't know.

B. *The Advantages or Benefits of Curriculum Autonomy*

1. Better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers at the local school level.
2. Greater teacher involvement, satisfaction and commitment.
3. More personalised and meaningful learning for students.
4. Freedom from external restraints, pressures and interference.
5. Able to offer a particular elective or develop new school-based courses.
6. Freedom to vary or select aspects of the curriculum guidelines supplied by the Department of Education.
7. Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum, programs, courses.

C. *Disadvantages of and Limitations to Curriculum Autonomy*

1. Lack of experienced/qualified staff for curriculum development.
2. Negative beliefs and attitudes of staff towards curriculum autonomy.
3. Extra work in planning and co-ordination of curriculum development.
4. Mobility of staff and/or students.
5. Lack of finance and/or resources.
6. Limitations imposed by external factors e.g. parents, exams, Department, employers.
7. Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in the curriculum, programs, courses.

D. *Perceived Extent of Autonomy Available*

1. Full autonomy.
2. Partial autonomy - some modifications.
3. Little or no autonomy.
4. Can't tell from answer.
5. No answer/don't know.

---

were suggested by the answers to the second question: "What does curriculum autonomy mean for you and your school?" This question did not specifically ask for opinions about the advantages/disadvantages of curriculum autonomy nor about the extent of autonomy available at their school. Nevertheless, in answering this question people usually made various positive (Set B) and negative comments (Set C) about curriculum autonomy, as well as indicating the extent of autonomy available at their school (Set D).

All categories within each set were designed by the present researcher to be mutually exclusive. For Sets A and D, each respondent's answer was classified into one category only within the set. In other words, for each person there could be only one category for interpretation of the term "curriculum autonomy" and only the category for interpretation of the extent of curriculum autonomy available at the school. For Sets B and C, however, people may have offered no, one or several comment(s) about the advantages or disadvantages of curriculum autonomy.

6.4.3 Final Categories of Analysis

The initial sets of categories were applied on a trial basis to the N.S.W. questionnaires (this being the first state in terms of postcode). After working through this data, it became apparent that additional categories were necessary and that two of the initial categories needed expanding for greater clarity. Five changes were then made, as follows:

(a) In Set A, an extra subcategory was added after number 3 to cater for answers which referred to *both* freedom from 'outside' control and meeting local needs and conditions.

(b) In Set B, an extra category was added to cover comments about the increase in parent/community participation in school activities resulting from curriculum autonomy.

(c) In Set C, an extra category was added for comments to the effect that curriculum autonomy causes division and frustration in the school.

(d) In Sets A and D, the last category of "No answer/don't know" was split into two categories - those who failed to answer this open-ended section of the questionnaire; and those who answered other questions in the open-ended section but who did not answer, or did not know the answer, to this particular question.

(e) In Sets B and C, the last category referred generally to "the curriculum, programs, courses". In each case, the category was expanded to cater for comments about specific aspects of curriculum development - aims and objectives; learning experiences, content, activities; teaching methods; student assessment methods; materials, equipment and resources; and time allocation. The general category was retained for people who responded in broad terms.

The revised categories are shown in Table 6.4. These were subsequently applied to the responses to questionnaires from all states, without the need for any changes in the method of classification. The N.S.W. data was re-analysed after completion of all other data sets.

6.5 *ANALYSIS OF THE DATA*

In this study only descriptive statistics are used to report the findings, that is, the number and percentage of respondents from various groups who offered different types of answers. No inferential statistical tests (e.g. X^2, t test) have been used to further analyze data, for three reasons.

First, this was an exploratory study of the viewpoints of school staffs concerning curriculum autonomy. These opinions were expressed in response to two open-ended items in the context of a large-scale questionnaire survey. Answers were in the form of written responses which varied greatly in length and scope. This qualitative dimension of the data, which can only be gleaned by an actual reading of respondents' answers, was most important and an attempt has been made to preserve this aspect by extensive quoting throughout the findings chapter. Although respondents' answers were classified into numerous categories, the data formed, at best, only a nominal scale. This fact restricted the range of possible inferential statistics.

The second reason for not using inferential statistics was that, from a theoretical point of view, the type of data obtained did not meet the complex requirements of inferential statistics. At least two decades ago, Selvin strongly criticized the use of significance tests in survey research of the kind reported in this paper:

> Statistical tests are unsatisfactory in non-experimental research for two fundamental reasons: it is almost impossible to design studies that meet the conditions for using

TABLE 6.4 : FINAL CATEGORIES USED IN PROJECT ANALYSES

A. The Meaning of Curriculum Autonomy

1. The school/teachers have freedom to determine the curriculum/school-based curriculum development.
    - *Subcategory 1* - Respondents provided no further amplification.
    - *Subcategory 2* - Reference to the curriculum meeting local needs and conditions.
    - *Subcategory 3* - Reference to freedom from "outside' interference/control.
    - *Subcategory 4* - Reference to both freedom from "outside" control and meeting local needs and conditions.
2. Idiosyncratic answers, but implied "correct" understanding of curriculum autonomy.
3. Idiosyncratic answers, with implied "incorrect" understanding of curriculum autonomy.
4. No answer/don't know.
5. No answer to this part of the questionnaire.

B. The Advantages or Benefits of Curriculum Autonomy

1. Better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers at the local school level.
2. Greater teacher involvement, satisfaction and commitment.
3. More personalised and meaningful learning for students.
4. Greater parent/community participation in school activities.
5. Freedom from external restraints, pressures and interference.
6. Able to offer a particular elective or develop new school-based courses.
7. Freedom to vary or select aspects of the curriculum guidelines supplied by the Department of Education.
8. Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum, programs, courses (in general).
9. Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in - aims and objectives.
10. Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in - learning experiences, content, activities.
11. Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in - teaching methods.
12. Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in - student assessment methods
13. Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in - materials, equipment and resources.
14. Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in - time allocation.

C. Disadvantages of and Limitations to Curriculum Autonomy

1. Lack of experienced/qualified staff for curriculum development.
2. Negative beliefs and attitudes of staff towards curriculum autonomy.
3. Extra work in planning and co-ordination of curriculum development.
4. Mobility of staff and/or students.
5. Lack of finance and/or resources.
6. Limitations imposed by "external" factors, e.g. parents, exams, Department, employers.
7. It causes division and frustration in the school.
8. Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in the curriculum, programs, courses (in general).
9. Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in - aims and objectives.
10. Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in - learning experiences, content, activities.
11. Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in - teaching methods.
12. Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in - student assessment methods.
13. Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in - materials, equipment and resources.
14. Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in - time allocation.

D. Perceived Extent of Autonomy Available.

1. Full autonomy.
2. Partial autonomy - some modifications.
3. Little or no autonomy.
4. No answer/don't know.
5. Can't tell from answer.
6. No answer to this part of questionnaire.

> the tests, and the situations in which the tests are employed make it difficult to draw correct inferences. (Selvin, 1957: 527)

Moreover, in the last decade or so the whole use of traditional statistical methods in social research has increasingly come under attack. For example, Bakan (1966: 436) claimed that "the test of statistical significance in psychological research may be taken as an instance of a kind of essential mindlessness in the conduct of research". Shulman (1970: 389) admonished that "the time has arrived for educational researchers to divest themselves of the yoke of statistical hypothesis testing". Cronbach (1975: 124) argued that "the time has arrived to exorcise the null hypothesis". More recently Carver (1978: 392) concluded, after a detailed analysis, that "such testing is not only useless, it is also harmful because it is interpreted to mean something it is not". He recommended that we should return to the scientific method of examining data and replicating results, rather than relying on statistical significance testing.

Third, in an exploratory study of this kind it was considered far more important to examine the data for substantive significance than for statistical significance. Most statisticians agree that these two concepts are independent of each other (e.g. Morrison & Henkel, 1969; Winch & Campbell, 1969; Taylor & Frideres, 1972). Kish (1959) pointed out that research results are substantively significant "if they are consistent with relationships postulated in substantive scientific theory" or "because of their 'nature' or magnitude". The latter criterion has been used in this research to examine results for their substantive significance; the reader is invited to do likewise.

> Just as the presence of inferential statistics in a report should not enhance its conclusions, their absence should not induce neglect of these conclusions by the public. (Derrick, 1976: 37)

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS

The findings are presented in three major sections. The first section provides information on how respondents interpreted the term 'curriculum autonomy'. In the second section, respondents' views on the advantages and/or disadvantages of curriculum autonomy are outlined. The third section reports on the extent of curriculum autonomy perceived as being available to respondents in their schools. In each section, Australia-wide findings are presented first; then inter-state and inter-respondent differences in answers are discussed.

7.1 PERCEIVED MEANING OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY

Table 7.1 shows the percentage of respondents, by state and by responsibility (principal, head of department and teacher), who gave different responses to the question: What do you understand by the phrase "curriculum autonomy"?

7.1.1 Australia-Wide Findings

About three quarters of respondents in the national sample (n=574) gave one commonly-accepted meaning for curriculum autonomy: that the school/teachers have freedom to determine the curriculum or that it means school-based curriculum development. This category accounted for 76% of all answers and when non-responses are excluded the figure rises to 90%.

Most of the respondents offering this basic interpretation did so without any amplification or qualification (see category 1.1 in Table 7.1). Typical of the responses embraced by this perception of the meaning of curriculum autonomy were the following:

> Curriculum autonomy is the power to write, plan, effect and evaluate our own curricula. (Principal, N.S.W.)
>
> The responsibility of a school to set its aims and then devise those courses and policies which they believe will realise those aims. (Head of Department, Tasmania)
>
> It is what to a certain extent we already have in Years 7-10 in Victoria. Each school devises its own curriculum. (Teacher, Victoria)

TABLE 7.1 : PERCEIVED MEANING OF THE TERM CURRICULUM AUTONOMY

Respondent State & Responsibility		Category 1 - The School/Teachers Have Freedom to Determine the Curriculum								Category 2 Idiosyncratic Answers - Implied "Correct" Understanding		Category 3 Idiosyncratic Answers - Implied "Incorrect" Understanding		Category 4 No Answer or Don't Know		Category 5 No Answer To This Part of Q'aire		TOTAL
		1.1 No Further Amplification		1.2 Reference to Meeting Local Needs		1.3 Reference to Freedom From Outside Control		1.4 Reference to Both Control & Needs										
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
NSW	P	3	37.5	2	25.0	1	12.5	2	25.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
	HD	12	35.3	13	38.2	4	11.8	1	2.9	1	2.9	2	5.9	0	0	1	2.9	34
	T	22	50.0	7	15.9	6	13.6	2	4.5	2	4.5	4	9.1	1	2.3	0	0	44
	TOTAL	37	43.0	22	25.6	11	12.8	5	5.8	3	3.5	6	7.0	1	1.2	1	1.2	86
VIC	P	5	38.5	5	38.5	1	7.7	1	7.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7.7	13
	HD	6	31.6	2	10.5	4	21.1	1	5.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	31.6	19
	T	22	34.4	8	12.5	13	20.3	3	4.7		1.6	4	6.3	1	1.6	12	18.8	64
	TOTAL	33	34.4	15	15.6	18	18.8	5	5.2	.	1.0	4	4.2	1	1.0	19	19.8	96
QLD	P	4	40.0	1	10.0	2	20.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	10.0	2	20.0	10
	HD	7	41.2	1	5.9	2	11.8	1	5.9	2	11.8	2	11.8	0	0	2	11.8	17
	T	18	48.6	4	10.8	2	5.4	0	0	2	5.4	2	5.4	2	5.4	7	18.9	37
	TOTAL	29	45.3	6	9.4	6	9.4	1	1.6	4	6.3	4	6.3	3	4.7	11	17.2	64
SA	P	3	25.0	7	58.3	1	8.3	0	0	1	8.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
	HD	11	47.8	4	17.4	4	17.4	2	8.7	1	4.3	0	0	0	0	1	4.3	23
	T	34	45.3	7	9.3	13	17.3	4	5.3	2	2.7	5	6.7	2	2.7	8	10.7	75
	TOTAL	48	43.6	18	16.4	18	16.4	6	5.5	4	3.6	5	4.5	2	1.8	9	8.2	110
WA	P	1	11.1	5	55.6	1	11.1	0	0	2	22.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
	HD	8	40.0	2	10.0	7	35.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	15.0	20
	T	22	39.3	10	17.9	8	14.3	0	0	1	1.8	3	5.4	3	5.4	9	16.1	56
	TOTAL	31	36.5	17	20.0	16	18.8	0	0	3	3.5	3	3.5	3	3.5	12	14.1	85
TAS	P	6	61.5	1	7.7	3	23.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7.7	0	0	13
	HD	15	60.0	4	16.0	2	8.0	0	0	1	4.0	3	12.0	0	0	0	0	25
	T	27	44.3	9	14.8	3	4.9	1	1.6	1	1.6	3	4.9	3	4.9	14	23.0	61
	TOTAL	50	50.5	14	14.1	8	8.1	1	1.0	2	2.0	6	6.1	4	4.0	14	14.1	99
ACT	P	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	HD	1	33.3	2	66.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	T	7	41.2	0	0	4	23.5	1	5.9	1	5.9	0	0	2	11.8	2	11.8	17
	TOTAL	9	40.9	3	13.6	4	18.2	1	4.5	1	4.5	0	0	2	9.1	2	9.1	22
NT	P	0	0	0	0	1	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	HD	0	0	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	T	1	11.1	1	11.1	1	11.1	0	0	1	11.1	0	0	1	11.1	4	44.4	9
	TOTAL	1	8.3	2	16.7	3	25.0	0	0	1	8.3	0	0	1	8.3	4	33.3	12
AUST	P	25	36.8	22	32.4	10	14.7	3	4.4	3	4.4	0	0	2	2.9	3	4.4	68
	HD	60	42.0	29	20.3	24	16.8	5	3.5	5	3.5	7	4.9	0	0	13	9.1	143
	T	153	42.1	46	12.7	50	13.8	11	3.0	11	3.0	21	5.8	15	4.1	56	15.4	263
	TOTAL	238	41.5	97	16.9	84	14.6	19	3.3	19	3.3	28	4.9	17	3.0	72	12.5	574

NOTE: P = Principals; HD = Heads of Departments; T = Teachers.

> Privilege to develop one's own program in a particular discipline. (Head of Department, Queensland)

However, 17% of all respondents also included in their definitions reference to the curriculum meeting local needs and conditions as being fundamental to curriculum autonomy (category 1.2 in Table 7.1). The following examples illustrate this point:

> The right and responsibility for the curriculum adopted by a school as evolved by the staff with the contribution of community-interest groups, including parents and in the light of the expressed wishes of students and in cognisance of the needs of the community. (Principal, South Australia)
>
> Being able to implement educational aims within the school which the school thinks will be most useful for those students within that school. This may mean that there will be a different curriculum for different groups within that school, dependent on the abilities and goals of the students concerned. Probably in the ideal situation, each student should have his own curriculum based on his individual needs. This contrasts greatly with the idea of the Department developing a curriculum with the intent of covering all the students in the State. (Teacher, Queensland)
>
> The ability of the school and/or subject department to develop, implement and evaluate its own curricula after taking into account due consideration of pupil, teacher, parent and community expectations and interests. (Head of Department, A.C.T.)
>
> The freedom of the school and the individual teacher to implement a program of study based on local conditions and needs of student body, both individually and collectively. (Teacher, N.S.W.)

Also included in the 76% offering the same basic meaning for curriculum autonomy, were 15% of all respondents who mentioned freedom from "outside" interference/control as a fundamental component (category 1.3 in Table 7.1). The following examples show this particular emphasis:

> ....the school teachers can use their discretion in the choice of material used and courses offered and not follow a rigid curriculum which has been evolved by remote officers of the Education Department. (Teacher, Tasmania)
>
> That I or we can decide the curriculum without the external pressures of the Education Department or any examining body. (Head of Department, N.S.W.)
>
> ....a school is allowed to devise its own curriculum without being dictated to by a state controlling body. (Teacher, Northern Territory)

> That each school be free to choose or design its own curriculum and method of implementation, and not be required to submit it to the Board for approval. (Teacher, Western Australia)

Three per cent of all respondents included reference to both freedom from outside control/interference and meeting local needs and conditions in their definition of curriculum autonomy (category 1.4 in Table 7.1). The following quotations exemplify this dual emphasis:

> That the curriculum ought to be free from impersonal style restraints e.g. of spaces, of equipment, of staffing schedules based on numbers, of unreasonable financial constraints, of externally imposed curricula, of timetables which reflect these restraints. Rather, that the curriculum should reflect the needs, special characteristics of that community, the students and teachers. A personal thing not controlled by the impersonal. (Principal, Victoria)
>
> The situation where the school, having ascertained pupil/teacher/parent needs, determines the curriculum without Departmental direction or restraint. (Principal, N.S.W.)
>
> Where each school devises *own* curriculum to suit needs of students in the particular area, rather than have departmental curriculum of a certain set of subjects with a certain set amount of time apportioned to each subject imposed upon a school. (Head of Department, South Australia)
>
> The right of each school to decide what experiences it will offer to students and how much time will be allocated to each i.e. the complete freedom of each school to plan its own program. By the School I mean the board, the staff, students and parents - all those with a direct interest as distinct from a central authority. (Head of Department, A.C.T.)

A further three percent of respondents gave idiosyncratic answers which were not classifiable into the above categories. However, their responses taken singly or in conjunction with their second answers implied a similar understanding of 'curriculum autonomy' to the majority view. The following were typical of these idiosyncratic answers:

> "Chaos"; "curriculum anarchy"; "freedom of the curriculum itself - no dependence upon others for service"; "not restricted to a set of instructions on what to teach, but rather limited only by student response and level".

Most respondents offered one form or another of the commonly-accepted definition for curriculum autonomy without delving into complexities of meaning. However, some individuals distinguished different levels of autonomy within the school. For example, there was the view that curriculum autonomy should be "teacher-based":

> As I understand autonomy as the right of an individual or a body of people to make their own decisions concerning what they do then curriculum autonomy could be freedom for the teacher or the department or the school to decide what should be taught. I think the most likely and feasible of these would be curriculum autonomy for the individual teacher. (Teacher, Queensland)

Other respondents saw the individual department or faculty as the most appropriate level for curriculum autonomy. Examples of responses reflecting this preference were:

> Complete control over curriculum by individual departments within each school. (Teacher, Western Australia)
>
> Freedom within the department to do and teach what we teachers in that department wish to do without influence from other departments or principal or Education Department. (Teacher, Tasmania)

On the other hand, several respondents recognised the difficulties of granting complete curriculum autonomy to either the individual teacher or department/faculty. Responses of this kind included the following:

> Curriculum autonomy could be taken on two planes - autonomy for the school or autonomy for the individual teacher. The latter seems impractical if the school is to have a common purpose... (Teacher, Tasmania)
>
> ...But it (curriculum autonomy) does not mean complete faculty independence or empire-building. The curriculum is a 'total' school matter and should be intricately part of the school's philosophy, not separate from it. (Head of Department, South Australia)

Finally, there were suggestions by a few individuals of a need to recognise, respond to and indeed make use of, factors outside the school influencing curriculum decision-making. The following example shows this emphasis:

> ...To me the term does not mean that the school would be entirely responsible for constructing its own curricula. Outside advice and agencies would be available to give help in this hypothetical situation. (Principal, South Australia)

Only 5% of all respondents gave answers which might be labelled as "incorrect" interpretations of the term 'curriculum autonomy', that is, not in agreement with commonly accepted perceptions. In addition, however, 3% either gave no answer, or said that they did not know the answer. Some of the "incorrect" responses were in complete opposition to the commonly - accepted meaning offered by the majority, e.g. "curriculum decided by only a few people at the top - no staff participation"; "...lack of flexibility. Not being able to alter content or topic"; and "...the curriculum is so demanding on both child and teacher that there is little time left for self expression". Other responses indicated very individualistic interpretations, e.g. "That the curriculum will look after and run by itself"; "a curriculum that disregards the needs of other subject areas"; and "the degree to which curriculum is remote from, or independent from, the requirements, needs, etc. of the world outside the school".

7.1.2 Inter-State and Inter-Respondent Differences

The vast majority of people in all states (90%) gave one commonly-accepted meaning for curriculum autonomy: that the school/teachers have freedom to determine the curriculum. Therefore, comparisons of answers across states and across types of respondent could only be made with the particular sub-categories of emphasis for this one basic interpretation (i.e. categories 1.1 to 1.4 in Table 7.1).

In this respect, Tasmania had the highest percentage of respondents (51%) who offered the basic meaning without amplification, while the Northern Territory had the lowest percentage (8%). N.S.W. had the highest proportion of answers referring to the curriculum meeting local needs and conditions (26%), with Queensland having the lowest proportion (9%). Northern Territory (25%) had the highest percentage of answers referring to freedom from outside control/interference, while Tasmania had the lowest percentage (8%).

In contrasting responses among principals, heads of department and teachers, the only noteworthy difference occurred with respect to answers which included reference to the curriculum meeting local needs and conditions. Principals had the highest proportion of such responses (32%), followed by heads of department (20%) and teachers (13%). While these inter-state and inter-respondent differences in emphasis are suggestive of further research, they cannot be regarded as being of substantive significance in this study.

7.2 PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY

In answering the question "What does curriculum autonomy mean for you and your school?", respondents invariably commented upon the advantages or benefits of curriculum autonomy and upon the disadvantages of and limitations to curriculum autonomy. These responses are described under separate headings below and in a final sub-section a comparison of advantages and disadvantages is made.

7.2.1 Perceived Advantages or Benefits of Curriculum Autonomy

Table 7.2 shows the percentage of respondents, by state and by responsibility, who commented on the advantages or benefits of curriculum autonomy.

Australia-Wide Findings

Generalising across respondents from all states, the most frequently mentioned advantage of curriculum autonomy (28% of respondents) was that it allows for much greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum, programs, courses (in general). The following examples illustrate this point:

> The freedom to teach what I think is necessary in the way I choose to do so within the overall plan of the school curriculum. To have some say in the planning of school curriculum. To be free to experiment. (Head of Department, Victoria)
>
> ....I enjoy 'curriculum autonomy'. We have developed the best curriculum as we see it, for the girls in this school about to face the 80's. The curriculum is devised so that the overall development of the young person is catered for. (Principal, Tasmania)

In addition to the general comments about freedom in curriculum, 23% of respondents mentioned increased freedom and flexibility in specific aspects of curriculum development (categories 9-14 in Table 7.2). The two most frequently cited examples here were - "learning experiences, content, activities" (9% of respondents); and "teaching methods" (6% of respondents), e.g.

> It means a freedom to teach areas that interest both me and my students rather than 'wading' through uninteresting material to get to the good parts.... (Teacher, N.S.W.)
>
> The right to choose teaching strategies rather than the selection of aims, objectives or the bulk of core content. (Teacher, Queensland)

TABLE 7.8 : PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES OR BENEFITS OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY

Respondent State & Responsibility		Category 1 Better Able To Meet Needs Of Individuals		Category 2 Greater Teacher Involvement Commitment		Category 3 More Personalised Learning for Students		Category 4 Greater Parent/ Community Participation		Category 5 Freedom From External Pressures		Category 6 Able to Develop School-Based Courses		Category 7 Freedom to Vary Dept'al Curriculum Guidelines	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
	P	2	28.6	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	28.6	3	42.9
NSW	HD	5	18.5	3	11.1	1	3.7	1	3.7	1	3.7	4	14.8	9	33.3
	T	10	27.0	5	13.5	4	10.8	1	2.7	3	8.1	2	5.4	6	16.2
	TOTAL	17	23.9	9	12.7	5	7.0	2	2.8	4	5.6	8	11.3	18	25.4
	P	2	16.7	2	16.7	0	0	1	8.3	2	16.7	0	0	1	8.3
VIC	HD	5	45.5	1	9.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9.1
	T	13	40.0	5	11.9	2	4.8	2	4.8	8	19.0	0	0	2	4.8
	TOTAL	20	30.8	8	12.3	2	3.1	3	4.6	10	15.4	0	0	4	6.2
	P	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	14.3	1	14.3
QLD	HD	2	16.7	3	25.0	1	8.3	0	0	1	8.3	1	8.3	0	0
	T	1	4.8	0	0	1	4.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	4	10.0	3	7.5	2	5.0	0	0	1	2.5	2	5.0	1	2.5
	P	4	33.3	4	33.3	0	0	2	16.7	1	8.3	2	16.7	0	0
SA	HD	6	28.6	6	28.6	3	14.3	0	0	1	4.8	2	9.5	0	0
	T	13	22.0	10	16.9	4	6.8	0	0	4	6.8	3	5.1	0	0
	TOTAL	23	25.0	20	21.7	7	7.6	2	2.2	6	6.5	7	7.6	0	0
	P	3	37.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	12.5	0	0
WA	HD	3	18.8	1	6.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	12.5	0	0
	T	11	25.6	0	0	3	7.0	0	0	1	2.3	0	0	1	2.3
	TOTAL	17	25.4	1	1.5	3	4.5	0	0	1	1.5	3	4.5	1	1.5
	P	7	58.3	1	8.3	0	0	0	0	1	8.3	1	8.3	2	16.7
TAS	HD	7	31.8	3	13.6	1	4.5	0	0	2	9.1	1	4.5	3	13.6
	T	11	29.7	4	10.8	0	0	0	0	2	5.4	3	8.1	9	24.3
	TOTAL	25	35.2	8	11.3	1	1.4	0	0	5	7.0	5	7.0	14	19.7
	P	1	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
ACT	HD	3	100.0	1	33.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	T	2	16.7	1	8.3	1	8.3	0	0	4	33.3	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	6	35.3	2	11.8	1	5.9	0	0	4	23.5	0	0	0	0
	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NT	HD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	T	1	33.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	33.3
	TOTAL	1	16.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	16.7
	P	20	32.8	8	13.1	0	0	3	4.9	4	6.6	7	11.5	7	11.5
AUST	HD	31	27.2	18	15.8	6	5.3	1	0.9	5	4.4	10	8.8	13	11.4
	T	62	24.4	25	9.8	15	5.9	3	1.2	22	8.7	8	3.1	19	7.5
	TOTAL	113	26.3	51	11.9	21	4.9	7	1.6	31	7.2	25	5.8	39	9.1

NOTE: P = Principals; HD = Heads of Departments; T = Teachers.

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TABLE 7.8 (Continued) : PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES OR BENEFITS OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY

Respondent State & Responsibility		Category 8		Category 9		Category 10		Category 11		Category 12		Category 13		Category 14		TOTAL
		Greater Freedom, Flexibility And Variety In -														
		The Curriculum/ Programs Courses(General		Aims & Objectives		Learning Experiences Content		Teaching Methods		Student Assessment		Materials Equipment Resources		Time Allocation		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
NSW	P	2	28.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
	HD	8	29.6	1	3.7	4	14.8	1	3.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
	T	6	16.2	1	2.7	9	24.3	4	10.8	0	0	1	2.7	2	5.4	37
	TOTAL	16	22.5	2	2.8	13	18.3	5	7.0	0	0	1	1.4	2	2.8	71
VIC	P	5	41.7	0	0	2	16.7	1	8.3	1	8.3	0	0	1	8.3	12
	HD	5	45.5	0	0	2	18.2	0	0	0	0	3	27.3	0	0	11
	T	14	33.3	1	2.4	2	4.8	2	4.8	1	2.4	1	2.4	1	2.4	42
	TOTAL	24	36.9	1	1.5	6	9.2	3	4.6	2	3.1	4	6.2	2	3.1	65
QLD	P	3	42.9	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	1	14.3	1	14.3	0	0	7
	HD	2	16.7	1	8.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
	T	5	23.8	0	0	1	4.8	5	23.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	21
	TOTAL	10	25.0	1	2.5	2	5.0	5	12.5	1	2.5	1	2.5	0	0	40
SA	P	3	25.0	0	0	2	16.7	2	16.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
	HD	5	23.8	0	0	1	4.8	0	0	0	0	1	4.8	1	4.8	21
	T	23	39.0	1	1.7	8	13.6	6	10.2	0	0	2	3.4	2	3.4	59
	TOTAL	31	33.7	1	1.1	11	12.0	8	8.7	0	0	3	3.3	3	3.3	92
WA	P	2	25.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
	HD	3	18.8	1	6.3	1	6.3	2	12.5	1	6.3	1	6.3	0	0	16
	T	15	34.9	0	0	3	7.0	1	2.3	0	0	1	2.3	0	0	43
	TOTAL	20	29.9	1	1.5	4	6.0	3	4.5	1	1.5	2	3.0	0	0	67
TAS	P	1	8.3	0	0	1	8.3	1	8.3	0	0	1	8.3	0	0	12
	HD	6	27.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22
	T	7	18.9	3	8.1	2	5.4	1	2.7	0	0	1	2.7	1	2.7	37
	TOTAL	14	19.7	3	4.2	3	4.2	2	2.8	0	0	2	2.8	1	1.4	71
ACT	P	1	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	HD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	T	6	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
	TOTAL	7	41.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17
NT	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	HD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	TOTAL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
AUST	P	17	27.9	0	0	6	9.8	4	6.6	2	3.3	2	3.3	1	1.6	61
	HD	29	25.4	3	2.6	8	7.0	3	2.6	1	0.9	5	4.4	1	0.9	114
	T	76	29.9	6	2.4	25	9.8	19	7.5	1	0.4	6	2.4	6	2.4	254
	TOTAL	122	28.4	9	2.1	39	9.1	26	6.1	4	0.9	13	3.0	8	1.9	429

NOTE: P = Principals; HD = Heads of Departments; T = Teachers.

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Another benefit cited by a significant percentage (26%) of respondents was that through curriculum autonomy the school is better able to meet the needs and interests of individual students and teachers at the local school level. The following responses were typical of this reaction:

> This is a school with a large migrant population (around 1/3) and it (curriculum autonomy) enables the courses to be more adaptable and more suitable for their changing requirements. It means that schools can plan ahead better and tie the different subject fields together better with interdepartmental discussion.... (Teacher, South Australia)
>
> We have no predetermined curricula. This enables us to develop the types of courses which we feel best able to teach and which suit the particular students of this area (geographical). (Teacher, Victoria)

Twelve percent of all respondents claimed that curriculum autonomy had forced teachers to become more involved in the planning and implementation of the school curriculum, which in turn led to increased teacher commitment and work satisfaction. Examples of responses reflecting this advantage were:

> A lot of hard work, but the satisfaction of working to a task for which you have thought out the goals and methods and thus to which you will probably be more committed. (Head of Department, Queensland)
>
> I believe we feel that we have the freedom necessary to plan content and methods in such a way as to permit our professional development and satisfaction. (Head of Department, N.S.W.)

Freedom to vary or select aspects of curriculum guidelines supplied by the Department of Education to suit the particular circumstances of the school/class was an advantage cited by 9% of all respondents. Responses of this kind included the following:

> For this school, curriculum autonomy is limited to a selection of existing prescribed areas of study ... However, within traditional areas of study (e.g., English) there is some scope for local variation to meet special needs - such as reading problems, remoteness etc. (Head of Department, N.S.W.)
>
> The ability to select aspects of various curricula provided by the Department of Education, for implementation in our school. (Teacher, Western Australia)

Seven percent of respondents commented that curriculum autonomy had given teachers freedom from external restraints, pressures and interference, which for so long had been controlling or interfering with effective curriculum development. The following examples show this particular emphasis:

> A chance to break away from the yoke of officialdom - and devise a course that is meaningful to students and teachers. (Head of Department, Tasmania)
>
> Not being tied down by excessively rigid guidelines laid down by the Secondary Schools Board on pupils (individuals totally different to themselves) which I feel they don't really know....(Teacher, N.S.W.)

The advantage of being able to offer a particular elective or to develop completely new courses at the individual school level was mentioned by 6% of respondents. Responses of this kind included the following:

> We have been able to design our own courses in most subjects in Years 8-10. We have even more autonomy now that we have dropped the Achievement Certificate for Years 8-10. (Head of Department, Western Australia)
>
> We have been able to write and effect two new curricula - Man and Society and Language Development. These experiences have been exciting and interesting, and hopefully we shall move on to other areas, however, shortage of time for planning is a paralysing factor. (Principal, N.S.W.)

Five percent of respondents claimed that through curriculum autonomy teachers could create a more personalised and meaningful learning environment for students. The following examples illustrate this point:

> If curriculum autonomy could be established it would mean a much more personalised learning situation for each child, and a much more professional approach to education by the school and the teacher. By organising a curriculum for a child (or class) and being responsible only to the child and its parents would be an extremely challenging and rewarding occupation.... (Teacher, N.S.W.)
>
> Freedom to provide a set of meaningful learning experiences to the students of this school and yet to know that what is provided is similar to that of any other school. (Head of Department, South Australia)

The benefit of curriculum autonomy leading to greater parent and community participation in school activities was cited by 2% of all respondents. An example reflecting this advantage was:

> ...If the schools and high level planners could open out to embrace those members of society who have a vested interest (which is everyone) in any curriculum, and if they were prepared to involve themselves and

> interact with each other in this regard then we would have a curriculum always fresh, always new and change would be the spark not the death knell. (Teacher, Tasmania)

The percentage of all respondents who commented on each of the advantages or benefits of curriculum autonomy was fairly small (ranging from 2% to 28% of respondents). The reader is reminded, however, that people were presenting ideas spontaneously and were not responding to structured proposals, as in other parts of the Curriculum Action Project questionnaire. This open-response mode appeared to be valuable in eliciting a *range* of opinions about curriculum autonomy from the teaching profession. Nevertheless, the fact that certain advantages were mentioned more often than others might be seen as an index of the actual incidence of opinions in the respective teaching populations of each state; such differences are discussed below.

Inter-State and Inter-Respondent Differences

There were several interstate differences in the perceived advantages of curriculum autonomy. South Australia had the highest percentage of respondents (22%) commenting upon the benefit of "greater teacher involvement, commitment and satisfaction". "Freedom from external restraints, pressures and interference" (24%) and "greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum, programs, courses" (41%) were mentioned by a greater proportion of A.C.T. respondents than any other group. The three advantages of "greater freedom, flexibility and variety in learning experiences, content, activities" (18%), "being able to offer a particular elective or develop new school-based courses" (11%) and "to vary or select aspects of the curriculum guidelines supplied by the Department of Education" (25%), were cited by a greater percentage of respondents from N.S.W. than from other states. Tasmania and the A.C.T. had the highest percentage of people (35%) commenting on the benefit of "being better able to meet the needs and interests of individual students and teachers at the local school", although this particular category was one of the most frequently cited for all states.

Certain advantages/benefits were not mentioned by any respondents from certain states. "Greater parent/community participation in school activities" was not cited by anyone from Queensland, Western Australia, Tasmania, the A.C.T. or the Northern Territory. No one from Victoria, the A.C.T. or the Northern Territory mentioned the advantage of "being able to offer a particular elective or develop new school-based courses". "Freedom to vary or select aspects of the curriculum guidelines supplied by the Department of Education" was not cited by anyone from South Australia or the A.C.T.

Generalising across Australia, no major differences emerged in the types or frequency of advantages/benefits raised by the three groups of respondents (teachers, heads of department and principals). However, within all states, except the Northern Territory, some marked variations were apparent which warrant discussion.

In N.S.W. a greater percentage of principals (29%) than heads of department (15%) or teachers (5%) claimed that they were "able to offer a particular elective or develop new school-based courses". The benefit of "freedom to vary or select aspects of the curriculum guidelines supplied by the Department of Education" was also cited by a greater proportion of principals (43%) than heads of department (33%) or teachers (16%). In addition, more principals (29%) and heads of department (30%) than teachers (16%) mentioned the advantage of "greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum (in general)". On the other hand, a greater percentage of teachers (24%) than heads of department (15%) and principals (0%) commented upon greater freedom in "learning experiences". The same trend was evident, albeit to a lesser extent, with respect to freedom in "teaching methods" (11% of teachers, 4% of heads of department and 0% of principals).

In Victoria, a greater percentage of heads of department (46%) and teachers (40%) than principals (17%) mentioned the advantage of "being better able to meet the needs and interests of individual students and teachers at the local school level". Also more heads of department (27%) than either teachers (2%) or principals (0%) referred to greater freedom, flexibility and variety in "materials, equipment and resources".

In Queensland, 25% of heads of department, by contrast to no principals or teachers, mentioned "greater teacher involvement, satisfaction and commitment" as an advantage of curriculum autonomy. A greater percentage of principals (43%) than either teachers (24%) or heads of department (17%) commented upon "greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum (in general)". However, 24% of teachers, by contrast to no principals or heads of department, cited greater freedom in "teaching methods".

In South Australia, a greater percentage of principals (33%) than teachers (22%) noted the advantage of "being better able to meet the needs and interests of individual students and teachers". Also a greater proportion of principals (33%) than teachers (17%) mentioned the benefit of "greater teacher involvement, satisfaction and commitment". However, a greater percentage of teachers (39%) than principals (25%) or heads of department (24%) referred to greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum.

In Western Australia, the advantage of "being better able to meet the needs and interests of individual teachers and students" was raised by a greater percentage of principals (26%) than teachers (26%) or heads of department (19%). However, a greater proportion of Western Australian teachers (35%) than principals (25%) or heads of department (19%) referred to greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum.

In Tasmania, a greater percentage of principals (58%) than heads of department (32%) and teachers (30%) noted the advantage of "being better able to meet the needs and interests of individual teachers and students". The benefit of greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum was cited by a greater percentage of heads of department (27%) than teachers (19%) or principals (8%).

In the A.C.T., 33% of teachers, by contrast to no principals or heads of department, cited "freedom from external pressures/interference" as a benefit of curriculum autonomy. A greater percentage of heads of department (100%) than principals (50%) or teachers (17%) mentioned the advantage of "being better able to meet the needs and interests of individual students and teachers".

However, a greater percentage of principals (50%) and teachers (50%) than heads of department (0%), commented upon "greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum (in general)".

7.2.2 *Perceived Disadvantages of and Limitations to Curriculum Autonomy*

Table 7.3 shows the percentage of respondents, by state and by responsibility, who commented on the disadvantages of and limitations to curriculum autonomy.

Australia-Wide Findings

Generalising across respondents from all states, the most frequently mentioned limitation to curriculum autonomy (14% of respondents) was that imposed by external factors such as tertiary institutions, parents, examinations and examination boards, the Department of Education and employers. The following examples illustrate this point:

> ...It is not of much use speaking of curriculum autonomy when it is not possible to achieve because of the influence exerted on the school by tertiary institutions and the desire of most parents to see that their child is given every opportunity to proceed to Years 11 and 12. 'Autonomy' suggests self-determination but this is not possible when a school is 'appraised' (or is it still inspected) - its curriculum is still well and truly influenced by central forces. ...All this restricts the freedom of the individual to develop his own potential. (Principal, N.S.W.)
>
> It (curriculum autonomy) doesn't really mean anything because in all subjects the curriculum is statewide and is determined by the State Education Department, Board of Secondary School Studies with influence from Tertiary Institutions, i.e. in Queensland, in say, Accounting, every secondary school teaches exactly the same course from exactly the same text. (Head of Department, Queensland)

Eight per cent of respondents cited the disadvantage/limitation of extra work/time in planning and co-ordination of curriculum development, brought about by curriculum autonomy. Responses of this kind included the following:

> It's something I think about and discuss but usually find I don't have much time (and sometimes energy) to do much more. We are working towards more autonomy but we are still influenced a great deal. So it tends to be more of an unrealistic ideal. (Teacher, Victoria)

TABLE 7.5 : PERCEIVED DISADVANTAGES OF AND LIMITATIONS TO CURRICULUM AUTONOMY

Respondent State & Responsibility		Category 1		Category 2		Category 3		Category 4		Category 5		Category 6		Category 7	
		No Qualified Staff for Curriculum Development		Negative Beliefs/ Attitudes of Staff		Extra Work in Curriculum Development		Mobility of Staff/ Students		Lack of Finance/ Resources		Limitations of External Factors		Causes Division/ Frustrations in School	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
NSW	P	1	14.3	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	0	0	3	42.9	0	0
	HD	1	3.7	1	3.7	5	18.5	2	7.4	0	0	3	11.1	0	0
	T	3	8.1	4	10.8	3	8.1	0	0	3	8.1	5	13.5	1	2.7
	TOTAL	5	7.0	5	7.0	9	12.7	2	2.8	3	4.2	11	15.5	1	1.4
VIC	P	0	0	1	8.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	HD	1	9.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9.1	0	0	0	0
	T	0	0	1	2.4	2	4.8	1	2.4	1	2.4	2	4.8	0	0
	TOTAL	1	1.5	2	3.1	2	3.1	1	1.5	2	3.1	2	3.1	0	0
QLD	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	28.6	0	0
	HD	2	16.7	1	8.3	3	25.0	0	0	0	0	4	33.3	0	0
	T	3	14.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	19.0	8	38.1	0	0
	TOTAL	5	12.5	1	2.5	3	7.5	0	0	4	10.0	14	35.0	0	0
SA	P	1	8.3	0	0	2	16.7	0	0	3	25.0	1	8.3	1	8.3
	HD	1	4.8	2	9.5	1	4.8	0	0	1	4.8	3	14.3	1	4.8
	T	4	6.8	2	3.4	1	1.7	0	0	1	1.7	8	13.6	0	0
	TOTAL	6	6.5	4	4.3	4	4.3	0	0	5	5.4	12	13.0	2	2.2
WA	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	12.5	0	0	2	25.0	0	0
	HD	2	12.5	1	6.3	3	18.8	0	0	1	6.3	3	18.8	1	6.3
	T	1	2.3	2	4.7	2	4.7	2	4.7	0	0	3	7.0	4	9.3
	TOTAL	3	4.5	3	4.5	5	7.5	3	4.5	1	1.5	8	11.9	5	7.5
TAS	P	1	8.3	2	16.7	2	16.7	2	16.7	0	0	1	8.3	0	0
	HD	2	9.1	1	4.5	2	9.1	0	0	0	0	6	27.3	0	0
	T	2	5.4	0	0	2	5.4	0	0	0	0	5	13.5	0	0
	TOTAL	5	7.0	3	4.2	6	8.5	2	2.8	0	0	12	16.9	0	0
ACT	P	0	0	0	0	1	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	HD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	T	0	0	0	0	1	8.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	0	0	2	11.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
NT	P	0	0	1	100.0	0	0	1	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	HD	0	0	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	T	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	2	33.3	1	16.7	1	16.7	0	0	0	0	0	0
AUST	P	3	4.9	4	6.6	6	9.8	4	6.6	3	4.9	9	14.8	1	1.6
	HD	9	7.9	7	6.1	15	13.2	2	1.8	3	2.6	19	16.7	2	1.8
	T	13	5.1	9	3.5	11	4.3	3	1.2	9	3.5	31	12.2	5	2.0
	TOTAL	25	5.8	20	4.7	32	7.5	9	2.1	15	3.5	59	13.8	8	1.9

NOTE: P = Principals; HD = Heads of Departments; T = Teachers.

TABLE 7.1 (Continued) : PERCEIVED DISADVANTAGES OF AND LIMITATIONS TO CURRICULUM AUTONOMY

Respondent State & Responsibility		Category 8		Category 9		Category 10		Category 11		Category 12		Category 13		Category 14		TOTAL
				Greater		Confusion, Lack		of Guidance		& Lower		Standards In				
		The Curriculum Programs/ Courses (General)		Aims & Objectives		Learning Experiences Content		Teaching Methods		Student Assessment Methods		Materials Equipment Resources		Time Allocation		
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
NSW	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
	HD	3	11.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	27
	T	4	10.8	1	2.7	0	0	0	0	2	5.4	1	2.7	0	0	37
	TOTAL	7	9.9	1	1.4	0	0	0	0	2	2.8	1	1.4	0	0	71
VIC	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
	HD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11
	T	3	7.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	42
	TOTAL	3	4.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	65
QLD	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7
	HD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
	T	0	0	0	0	1	4.8	0	0	1	4.8	0	0	0	0	21
	TOTAL	0	0	0	0	1	2.5	0	0	1	2.5	0	0	0	0	40
SA	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
	HD	1	4.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21
	T	0	0	1	1.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	59
	TOTAL	1	1.1	1	1.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	92
WA	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
	HD	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16
	T	2	4.7	0	0	0	0	1	2.3	1	2.3	0	0	0	0	43
	TOTAL	2	3.0	0	0	0	0	1	1.5	1	1.5	0	0	0	0	67
TAS	P	1	8.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8.3	0	0	0	0	12
	HD	1	4.5	0	0	1	4.5	0	0	1	4.5	0	0	1	4.5	22
	T	1	2.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	8.1	0	0	0	0	37
	TOTAL	3	4.2	0	0	1	1.4	0	0	5	7.0	0	0	1	1.4	71
ACT	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	HD	1	33.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	T	1	8.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	8.3	0	0	0	0	12
	TOTAL	2	11.8	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	5.9	0	0	0	0	17
NT	P	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	HD	1	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	T	2	66.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	33.3	0	0	0	0	3
	TOTAL	3	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	16.7	0	0	0	0	6
AUST	P	1	1.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1.6	0	0	0	0	61
	HD	7	6.1	0	0	1	0.9	0	0	1	0.9	0	0	1	0.9	114
	T	13	5.1	2	0.8	1	0.4	1	0.4	9	3.5	1	0.4	0	0	254
	TOTAL	21	4.9	2	0.5	2	0.5	1	0.2	11	2.6	1	0.2	1	0.2	429

NOTE: P = Principals; HD = Heads of Departments; T = Teachers.

> ...Inevitably the recommendations of the various curriculum committees are followed because - a) It is the easiest way for those in charge. b) It would take time and effort, which one does not have, to challenge the committees' recommendations. (Teacher, South Australia)

Lack of staff experienced or qualified in the field of curriculum development was a limitation/disadvantage of curriculum autonomy cited by 6% of respondents. The following responses were typical of this reaction:

> There is no one in this school with the necessary qualifications to draw up such a curriculum but there are quite a few willing to have a go! I believe curriculum planning is a matter of professional skill and not a willingness to participate and work hard. (Head of Department, Tasmania)
>
> (Curriculum autonomy is) Something we can use to a limited extent but are not sufficiently motivated or energetic or confident or well endowed with preparation time to implement. So we use prepared materials and programmes. (Head of Department, Western Australia)

Five per cent of respondents claimed that curriculum autonomy causes greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in the curriculum,programs, courses (in general). Examples of answers reflecting this disadvantage were:

> A fall-off in the standard of my teaching! Less time to prepare work. More self-examination, self-doubt and confusion (particularly as I swing between many subject areas e.g. Asian Social Studies, Social Science, Commerce, Economics, Australian History, Latin, Political Science). As far as the school is concerned standards also are quite low. (Teacher, A.C.T.)
>
> (Curriculum autonomy means) ...in practice, lack of useful guidance and, on a statewide basis, unrelated development and fragmentation of educational experience... (Head of Department, N.S.W.)

In addition to the general comments about confusion in the curriculum caused by curriculum autonomy, 4% of respondents mentioned greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in specific aspects of curriculum development (categories 9-14 in Table 7.3). Responses of this kind included the following:

> Can have autonomy if we want to but how do you assess students on an overall basis? (Teacher, Western Australia)

> ...To a few (teachers) who are uncertain of how to plan a curriculum this freedom causes concern and at times disillusionment over aims and the achievement of objectives. (Teacher, South Australia)

Five percent of respondents said that negative beliefs and attitudes of staff were a limitation to the success of curriculum autonomy. The following examples illustrate this point:

> (Curriculum autonomy means) little, for although we have it in theory, we are bound by staffing, and what teachers "expect to teach". Very few are prepared to take initiatives. (Principal, Northern Territory)
>
> Very little (curriculum autonomy) under existing circumstances - inadequate planning time, lack of interdepartmental liaison, vested interests determined to continue traditional subjects because not qualified to teach anything else. (Teacher, Western Australia)

Lack of finance and/or resources was a limitation to curriculum autonomy mentioned by 4% of respondents. Examples of answers reflecting this limitation were:

> Basically our school autonomy is being only restricted by tradition, conditions and finance. (Teacher, South Australia)
>
> It (curriculum autonomy) would mean little for the school as it is seriously underequipped and understaffed for such autonomy. (Teacher, N.S.W.)

Two percent of respondents claimed that the frequent transfer of both students and teachers from school to school (for a variety of reasons) was a limitation to the success of curriculum autonomy. The following responses were typical of this reaction:

> ...we have our own Year 10 geography/history course (which I intend to axe next year). Like most new courses in Western Australia the 'innovator' who dreamt it up stayed with the course six months, got promoted and moved on. (Head of Department, Western Australia)
>
> ...In rural areas, like this one, where there may be a large staff turnover, curriculum autonomy could present uncertainties through lack of continuity... (Principal, Tasmania)

Finally, 2% of respondents offered the criticism that curriculum autonomy causes division and frustration in the school. The following examples show this emphasis:

> Such a decision (what is to be taught) should not be made at the school level... It is the bain of my life! It is the cause of much division and frustration within the school. (Head of Department, South Australia)
>
> ... This school uses traditional curricula - really depends on Principal, and he is very conservative. In fact there are heated staffroom arguments in favour of say camping and he maintains a timid, procrastinating "I'll have to take the blame" attitude which inhibits development. (Teacher, South Australia)

Inter-State and Inter-Respondent Differences

There were several interstate differences in the perceived limitations/disadvantages of curriculum autonomy. A greater percentage of respondents from the Northern Territory than from any other state/territory mentioned four particular limitations/ disadvantages: "greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in the curriculum, programs, courses (in general)"- 50% of respondents; "negative beliefs and attitudes of staff towards curriculum autonomy" (33%); "extra time/work in planning and co-ordination of curriculum development" (17%); and "mobility of staff and students" (17%). Queensland had the highest proportion of people commenting on "lack of finance and/or resources" (10%), "lack of experienced/qualified staff for curriculum development" (13%), and "limitations imposed by external factors e.g. parents, exams, Department, employers" (35%). A greater percentage of respondents from Western Australia (8%) than from any other state claimed that curriculum autonomy "causes division and frustration in the school".

Certain disadvantages/limitations were not mentioned by any respondents from certain states. The problem of "mobility of staff and students" was not cited by anyone from Queensland, South Australia and the A.C.T. No respondent from Tasmania, the A.C.T. and the Northern Territory mentioned "a lack of finance and/or resources" as a limitation to curriculum autonomy. "It causes division and frustration in the school" was a disadvantage not raised by any respondents from Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, the A.C.T. and the Northern Territory. No one from Queensland claimed that curriculum autonomy caused "greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in the curriculum, programs, courses (in general)", although there were two comments to this effect concerning specifically "learning experiences" and "evaluation methods".

Generalising across Australia, no major differences emerged in the types or frequency of disadvantages/limitations raised by the three groups of respondents (teachers, heads of department and principals). Within certain states, however, such differences were apparent. In N.S.W., for example, a greater percentage of principals (43%) than teachers (14%) or heads of department (11%) mentioned "limitations imposed by external factors e.g. parents, exams, the Department, employers". However, not one principal claimed that curriculum autonomy causes "greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in the curriculum" (in general or in particular aspects of curriculum development), whereas some teachers and heads of department did mention this disadvantage. In Queensland, the only disadvantage/limitation cited by all three groups was "limitations imposed by external factors"; no Queensland principal raised any other disadvantage, whereas teachers and heads of department mentioned several more. A greater percentage of principals (25%) than heads of department (5%) or teachers (2%) from South Australia claimed that a lack of finance and/or resources was a limitation to curriculum autonomy. "Limitations imposed by external factors" was mentioned by a greater percentage of principals (25%) and heads of department (19%) than teachers (7%) in Western Australia, and by a greater percentage of heads of department (27%) than teachers (14%) and principals (8%) in Tasmania.

In summary, a large number of inter-state and inter-respondent differences were noted in the two sub-sections concerned with advantages and disadvantages. These data were itemized for the interest of readers from different states and for the purpose of suggesting further research. Due to the nature of this study, however, it is not possible to conclude that such differences are of substantive significance. Nevertheless, one important comparison was able to be made concerning perceived advantages and disadvantages of curriculum autonomy; this is described next.

7.2.3 *Comparison of Perceived Advantages and Disadvantages of Curriculum Autonomy*

Since respondents were not asked specifically to list advantages and/or disadvantages of curriculum autonomy, the majority made only one or two points in succinct terms, as reflected in the previous two sections. Several individuals, however, took some trouble to outline their points of view in great detail. For example, some respondents described numerous disadvantages of and/or limitations to curriculum autonomy. The following examples were typical of this reaction:

> A great deal of organisation, hard work, dialogue, patience and overcoming of indifference and apathy, plenty of money, intelligent pupils, class sizes of 10 or less, time for meetings, time for more lesson preparation, a laboratory assistant, having nothing else to do but teach science, dedication, the abolition of schools as places of job preparation, parents not being concerned about where their child comes in the class, and the removal of cynical attitudes on the part of individual teachers. (Teacher, N.S.W.)

> The greatest constraint is time. If tomorrow we were allowed curriculum autonomy (which would be a relatively small step in theory in Queensland), the practical constraints are enormous. We do not have the time or resources or expertise to develop a curriculum from the ground up, which is the only way to get it exactly as we want it. We are tied to commercially prepared texts and then do not have the time (or the motivation so often) to bend those prepared materials into a curriculum of our own, relevant for our students in their time. (Head of Department, Queensland)

> People untrained to curriculum development trying to perform a task with limited knowledge and less time. It means the staff works incredible hours, the students become confused and achieve less and the parents become frustrated and angry. (Principal, South Australia)

> Although curriculum autonomy appears to be ideal in theory I feel that if implemented then curriculum autonomy will result in too great a variation between courses offered in individual schools. Curriculum development is an area requiring specialist skills. Generally school staff members do not possess the skills or time to devote to such a complex task, while the community does not possess the knowledge of educational theory to enable them to appreciate the problems associated with implementing and devising a course of study. Influential but misguided individuals could well exercise a detrimental influence in individual schools. It appears to be an inefficient means of structuring curriculum and far too nebulous an approach to the problem.... (Teacher, Western Australia)

On the other hand, several respondents listed numerous advantages or benefits of curriculum autonomy in their answers. The following examples were typical of this reaction:

> That the school can set, examine and revise its goals and the means used to achieve them. It means that as a member of staff I can assist in this re-evaluation. It means I am not required to teach subject matter which is externally imposed, irrespective of the abilities, expectations and interests of the students. It means our school can exploit the diversity which the students at this school (from different ethnic backgrounds) bring with them to school. It means each individual student has a right to expect that his expectations, abilities and interests will be taken into account. (Teacher, Victoria)
>
> It could mean 1) a change in subject content 2) a change in time allocations for various subjects 3) greater teacher, headmistress and perhaps parent participation in defining curriculum content 4) more awareness, through greater participation, of the essential learnings a child should acquire (in order to succeed) before leaving school. (Teacher, N.S.W.)
>
> Say in what happens in own subject e.g. courses, teaching techniques. Subject matter. Freedom to attempt new ideas. No necessary dependence on other schools. A chance to update the school and to attempt new learning processes. Independence and most of all a *challenge* for all teachers and not just a few. Possibly more interaction between faculties within schools as must work closely together to make it work. (Teacher, South Australia)
>
> The department would and should be free to organize and implement time-tabling on open university type system where students of any age group can be found in the Art classes at any time. Curriculum could be organised to cover specific areas within the field Art, with Art teachers concentrating on their special areas of training and equipment and facilities provided accordingly - cuts down on wastage and allows for plenty of experimentation yet giving a sense of purpose to the child's studies through "in depth" approach to the subject area. Also would overcome the lack of flow on from year to year which at present exists. (Teacher, Western Australia)

Other respondents saw definite advantages to curriculum autonomy, but at the same time they recognised certain disadvantages or problems inherent in the granting of such freedom in curriculum development. The following quotations exemplify this dual emphasis:

> It means a wider scope of activities, better standards being achieved, a greater variety of work being carried out, and more interest and more students wanting to do technical subjects. It also means more work and time required by the teacher - it implies more resourcefulness and a wider scope for him to be able to cover. (Head of Department, N.S.W.)
>
> (1) Long hours of discussion, deferral, re-commitment and soul-searching
> (2) A degree of professional development and commitment in staff members much more pronounced than in previous years.
> (3) Impatience, inefficiency, delay and uncertainty while conflicting vested interests are reconciled.
> (4) A sense of purpose, responsibility and involvement which we would not willingly surrender. (Principal, South Australia)
>
> I can see it as having both beneficial and detrimental effects. Advantages - really catering for students' needs; ability to vary programme a lot more. Disadvantages - would have to be aware that students were maintaining a standard of learning to cope with life; lack of interest from staff could cause disaster. (Teacher, Victoria)
>
> A useful device to be considered carefully. It embodies many opportunities - some good but many could be detrimental to the school and to society. Curriculum autonomy will probably remove the "measuring stick" which has been the equipment of the community to measure education. In rural areas, like this one, where there may be a large staff turnover, curriculum autonomy could present uncertainties through lack of continuity. There will be a much greater responsibility upon the Principal and staff who in providing their brand of education may not meet the expectations of external pressures. There will be a likelihood of getting "bogged down" in detail. A challenging situation which will make further inroads into valuable teaching. (Principal, Tasmania)
>
> A hell of a lot of work! It throws a great responsibility on the position of Senior Master. The problem is that many staff are too engrossed in just keeping up with teaching their classes to be interested in establishing philosophical principles and devising the courses which express them. On the other hand, once the extra responsibility is accepted, there are advantages in the teacher understanding and believing in what he is doing and in the curriculum being tailored to local conditions and requirements. (Head of Department, Tasmania)

As respondents were not asked specifically to compare the advantages with the disadvantages of curriculum autonomy, it was not possible to make precise statistical comparisons. Nevertheless, a striking feature of the data was that, Australia-wide, a much smaller proportion of people mentioned disadvantages/limitations, compared to those who cited advantages/benefits - a fact which may be established by inspection of Tables 7.2 and 7.3. In other words, when asked for their reaction via non-structured questionnaire items, respondents were more likely to make comments concerning advantages/benefits rather than disadvantages/limitations of curriculum autonomy.

This characteristic of the data is more clearly shown in Table 7.4, which provides for each state/territory the most frequently cited advantages/benefits and disadvantages/limitations, with the relevant percentages of respondents in brackets (information extracted from Tables 7.2 and 7.3). Two exceptions to this national trend were evident: in both Queensland and the Northern Territory, the percentage of respondents citing disadvantages was much greater than the percentage mentioning advantages of curriculum autonomy. In the case of the Northern Territory, however, it should be noted that a total of only six respondents commented upon advantages/disadvantages, so the figures obtained may not be representative of that population.

7.3 PERCEIVED EXTENT OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY AVAILABLE

Respondents were asked the question: "What does curriculum autonomy mean for you and your school?" This implied that two answers could be given: the extent of autonomy available for the individual (principal, head of department or teacher); and the extent of autonomy available for the school as a whole. The vast majority of respondents did not differentiate between these two aspects in their answers. Furthermore, the type of information provided was limited by the fact that people did not describe in great detail the extent of autonomy available but responded in fairly general terms. Nevertheless, it was possible to classify most answers into one of three general categories: (a) full autonomy available; (b) partial autonomy available - some modifications; and (c) little or no autonomy available.

Table 7.5 shows the percentage of respondents, by state and by responsibility, who reported different degrees of curriculum autonomy being available. Note that 13% of respondents did not answer this part of the questionnaire at all (see category 6) and another 6% either gave no answer, or said that they did not know the answer, to this particular question (see category 4). In the case of a further 6% it was not possible to tell the extent of curriculum autonomy available from the person's response (see category 5).

TABLE 7.4 : MOST FREQUENTLY CITED ADVANTAGES/BENEFITS AND DISADVANTAGES/LIMITATIONS OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY, FOR EACH STATE/TERRITORY OF AUSTRALIA

NEW SOUTH WALES

Most Frequently Cited Advantages	
Freedom to vary or select aspects of Departmental curriculum guidelines	25%
Better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers	24%
Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum (in general)	23%

Most Frequently Cited Disadvantages	
Limitations of external factors e.g. parents, exams, employers	16%
Extra work in planning and co-ordination of curriculum development	13%

VICTORIA

Most Frequently Cited Advantages	
Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum (in general)	37%
Better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers	31%

Most Frequently Cited Disadvantages	
Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in the curriculum (in general)	5%

QUEENSLAND

Most Frequently Cited Advantages	
Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum (in general)	25%
Better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers	10%

Most Frequently Cited Disadvantages	
Limitations of external factors e.g. parents, exams, employers	35%
Lack of experienced/qualified staff for curriculum development	13%

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Most Frequently Cited Advantages	
Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum (in general)	34%
Better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers	25%
Greater teacher involvement, satisfaction and commitment	22%

Most Frequently Cited Disadvantages	
Limitations of external factors e.g. parents, exams, employers	13%

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Most Frequently Cited Advantages	
Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum (in general)	30%
Better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers	25%

Most Frequently Cited Disadvantages	
Limitations of external factors e.g. parents, exams, employers	12%

TASMANIA

Most Frequently Cited Advantages	
Better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers	35%
Freedom to vary or select aspects of Departmental curriculum guidelines	20%
Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum (in general)	20%

Most Frequently Cited Disadvantages	
Limitations of external factors e.g. parents, exams, employers	17%
Extra work in planning and co-ordination of curriculum development	9%

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Most Frequently Cited Advantages	
Greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum (in general)	41%
Better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers	35%
Freedom from external restraints, pressures and interference	24%

Most Frequently Cited Disadvantages	
Extra work in planning and co-ordination of curriculum development	12%
Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in the curriculum (in general)	12%

NORTHERN TERRITORY

Most Frequently Cited Advantages	
Better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers	17%
Freedom to vary or select aspects of Departmental curriculum guidelines	17%

Most Frequently Cited Disadvantages	
Greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in the curriculum (in general)	50%
Negative beliefs and attitudes of staff towards curriculum autonomy	33%

TABLE 7.6 : PERCEIVED EXTENT OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY AVAILABLE (all categories of analysis)

Respondent State & Responsibility		Category 1 Full Autonomy Available		Category 2 Partial Autonomy Available		Category 3 Little or No Autonomy		Category 4 No Answer Don't Know		Category 5 Can't Tell From Answer		Category 6 No Answer This Part of Q'aire		TOTAL
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
NSW	P	2	25.0	4	50.0	1	12.5	0	0	1	12.5	0	0	8
	HD	11	32.4	12	35.3	4	11.8	1	2.9	5	14.7	1	2.9	34
	T	18	40.9	10	22.7	9	20.5	3	6.8	4	9.1	0	0	44
	TOTAL	31	36.0	26	30.2	14	16.3	4	4.7	10	11.6	1	1.2	86
VIC	P	7	53.8	5	38.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7.7	13
	HD	9	47.4	2	10.5	0	0	1	5.3	0	0	7	36.8	19
	T	32	50.0	9	14.1	1	1.6	3	4.7	6	9.4	13	20.3	64
	TOTAL	48	50.0	16	16.7	1	1.0	4	4.2	6	6.3	21	21.9	96
QLD	P	2	20.0	5	50.0	0	0	1	10.0	0	0	2	20.0	10
	HD	5	29.4	2	11.8	5	29.4	3	17.6	0	0	2	11.8	17
	T	2	5.4	10	27.0	9	24.3	7	18.9	1	2.7	8	21.6	37
	TOTAL	9	14.1	17	26.6	14	21.9	11	17.2	1	1.6	12	18.8	64
SA	P	8	66.7	4	33.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
	HD	11	47.8	10	[illegible]	0	0	1	4.3	0	0	1	4.3	23
	T	39	52.0	11	[illegible]	9	12.0	3	4.0	4	5.3	9	12.0	75
	TOTAL	58	52.7	25	[illegible]	9	8.2	4	3.6	4	3.6	10	9.1	110
WA	P	2	22.2	2	[illegible]	4	44.4	0	0	1	11.1	0	0	9
	HD	8	40.0	3	[illegible]	5	25.0	0	0	1	5.0	3	15.0	20
	T	23	41.1	6	10.7	14	25.0	1	1.8	3	5.4	9	16.1	56
	TOTAL	33	38.8	11	12.9	23	27.1	1	1.2	5	5.9	12	14.1	85
TAS	P	8	61.5	4	30.8	0	0	0	0	1	7.7	0	0	13
	HD	11	44.0	9	36.0	2	8.0	0	0	3	12.0	0	0	25
	T	21	34.4	15	24.6	1	1.6	8	13.1	2	3.3	14	23.0	61
	TOTAL	40	40.4	[illegible]	28.3	3	3.0	8	8.1	6	6.1	14	14.1	99
ACT	P	2	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	HD	3	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	T	10	58.8	2	11.8	0	0	2	11.8	1	5.9	2	11.8	17
	TOTAL	15	68.2	2	9.1	0	0	2	9.1	1	4.5	2	9.1	22
NT	P	0	0	0	0	1	100.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
	HD	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	T	3	33.3	0	0	0	0	1	11.1	1	11.1	4	44.4	9
	TOTAL	4	33.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	1	8.3	4	33.3	12
AUST	P	31	45.6	24	35.3	6	8.8	1	1.5	3	4.4	3	4.4	68
	HD	59	41.3	39	27.3	16	11.2	6	4.2	9	6.3	14	9.8	143
	T	148	40.8	63	17.4	43	11.8	28	7.7	22	6.1	59	16.3	363
	TOTAL	238	41.5	126	22.0	65	11.3	35	6.1	34	5.9	76	13.2	574

NOTE: P = Principals; HD = Heads of Departments; T = Teachers.

In Table 7.6 the last three categories from Table 7.5 have been excluded, so that the percentage of respondents from each state who gave the three different classifiable responses - full, partial, little or no autonomy - may be seen more clearly. All figures quoted in the text below are from Table 7.6.

7.3.1 Australia-Wide Findings

Altogether 56% of respondents claimed that they had full or complete curriculum autonomy. The following quotations illustrate this perceived freedom in curriculum development:

> The right to develop a curriculum suited to the needs of the students and one that reflects the philosophy of myself and the staff. (Principal, N.S.W.)
>
> There is no outside authority (e.g. Education Department) imposing a standardized curriculum. This means the school can set a curriculum to suit its staff, students and environment. It means the individual teacher can teach what he/she desires. (Teacher, Victoria)
>
> A great deal of freedom and consequently responsibilities. We choose our own Science courses and have established a school science program for low achievers. Here of course we have a different set of objectives, so necessarily all the other changes also follow. School-wise it means more consultation - and discussion regarding e.g. overlap of content, etc. (Head of Department, Queensland)
>
> It means that innovations in content and its presentation can be made by the individual teacher - that units of work can be prepared without the pressures of an external influence, that the school also can become an autonomous body and within that school, the teacher has the incentive to experiment and improve the curriculum offered by the school. (Teacher, South Australia)
>
> Fortunately in our school staff members are encouraged to develop their own courses and a committee (elected by the staff) has been formed to assess the merits of each course. Within the English Department, staff are at liberty to teach what they like and how they like. (Teacher, Western Australia)
>
> Basically we make our own decisions to meet the needs of the students, bearing in mind their certification and vocational needs. Since we withdrew from the Schools Board Moderation Scheme which controlled the curriculum in Forms 7-10 we have had this freedom. (Principal, Tasmania)
>
> We virtually have it and after the current period of instability passes it will mean a better system for the teachers and the students. (Head of Department, A.C.T.)

TABLE 7.6 : PERCEIVED EXTENT OF CURRICULUM AUTONOMY AVAILABLE (excluding non-interpretable responses)

Respondent State & Responsibility		Category 1 Full Autonomy Available		Category 2 Partial Autonomy Available		Category 3 Little or No Autonomy		TOTAL
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N
NSW	P	2	28.6	4	57.1	1	14.3	7
	HD	11	40.7	12	44.4	4	14.8	27
	T	18	48.6	10	27.0	9	24.3	37
	TOTAL	31	43.7	26	36.6	14	19.7	71
VIC	P	7	58.3	5	41.7	0	0	12
	HD	9	81.8	2	18.2	0	0	11
	T	32	76.2	9	21.4	1	2.4	42
	TOTAL	48	73.8	16	24.6	1	1.5	65
QLD	P	2	28.6	5	71.4	0	0	7
	HD	5	41.7	2	16.7	5	41.7	12
	T	2	9.5	10	47.6	9	42.9	21
	TOTAL	9	22.5	17	42.5	14	35.0	40
SA	P	8	66.7	4	33.3	0	0	12
	HD	11	52.4	10	47.6	0	0	21
	T	39	66.1	11	18.6	9	15.3	59
	TOTAL	58	63.0	25	27.2	9	9.8	92
WA	P	2	25.0	2	25.0	4	50.0	8
	HD	8	50.0	3	18.8	5	31.3	16
	T	23	53.5	6	14.0	14	32.6	43
	TOTAL	33	49.3	11	16.4	23	34.3	67
TAS	P	8	66.7	4	33.3	0	0	12
	HD	11	50.0	9	40.9	2	9.1	22
	T	21	56.8	15	40.5	1	2.7	37
	TOTAL	40	56.3	28	39.4	3	4.2	71
ACT	P	2	100.0	0	0	0	0	2
	HD	3	100.0	0	0	0	0	3
	T	10	83.3	2	16.7	0	0	12
	TOTAL	15	88.2	2	11.8	0	0	17
NT	P	0	0	0	0	1	100.0	1
	HD	1	50.0	1	50.0	0	0	2
	T	3	100.0	0	0	0	0	3
	TOTAL	4	66.7	1	16.7	1	16.7	6
AUST	P	31	50.8	24	39.3	6	9.8	61
	HD	59	51.8	39	34.2	16	14.0	114
	T	148	58.3	63	24.8	43	16.9	254
	TOTAL	238	55.5	126	29.4	65	15.2	429

NOTE: P = Principals; HD = Heads of Departments; T = Teachers.

A further 29% of respondents indicated that they experienced some curriculum autonomy, albeit restricted in certain ways, for example, by: external syllabuses; examinations and examination boards/committees; curriculum guidelines, texts and other requirements laid down by the Department of Education; and parental and community pressures. The following responses are typical of respondents who claimed to have partial autonomy:

> Very little as there are only the slow learners who do not have a specified programme and one third of the time in Years 9 and 10 which is not prescribed. (Head of Department, N.S.W.)
>
> Questioning, direction seems to emerge officially when articulate members of the community raise issues at official school and Education Department levels. Community expectations do impose that restriction on local school autonomy. (Principal, Victoria)
>
> Quite a lot, although I am still controlled by the requirements of the Department of Education. In doing, or allowing to be done, areas outside this requirement, places me in a position where I may be castigated by my superiors. (Head of Department, Queensland)
>
> The P.E.B. examination at Year 12 determines curriculum content (a) totally at Year 12; (b) partially in each of Years 11, 10, 9, 8 (with variation from subject to subject). In the lower school (Years 8-10) and in subjects at Year 11 level which don't lead to P.E.B. Matriculation, there is in this school a high degree of awareness of the possibility of designing our own courses as we see fit, and this does happen quite frequently. (Head of Department, South Australia)
>
> To a certain extent, curriculum autonomy is in existence in my school in the electives. To this end, it depends entirely on what facilities are available. The core subjects (English, Maths, Science and Social Studies) are centralized. (Teacher, Western Australia)
>
> School is able to offer a quality programme in the core subjects, and the range of activities and other areas of interest varies according to the staff. We are free within the guidelines of the ... core curriculum - Adolescent Concerns, Language, Maths, Physical Environment, Social Environment, Arts and Crafts, Physical Education. (Head of Department, Tasmania)
>
> We have not got complete curriculum autonomy at this school as every course must be registered with the Education Authority. (Teacher, A.C.T.)

Fifteen percent of all respondents reported little or no curriculum autonomy available to them. Interestingly, these respondents mentioned the same types of restrictions and limitations as those who claimed to have partial autonomy, which suggests that the severity of any particular limitation to curriculum autonomy is very much a matter of individual perception. The following quotations exemplify the "little or no autonomy" category of response:

> At the moment while we are ruled by a Higher School Certificate - it is a pipe dream - Utopia perhaps. (Head of Department, N.S.W.)
>
> Very little - all my subjects have a syllabus, predetermined assignments and/or external examinations.... (Teacher, Victoria)
>
> Our school relies totally on guidelines of content, aims and assessment as designed in Brisbane. Autonomy is not possible due to moderation procedures for Grades 10, 11 and 12. Junior grades follow the same pattern as those of other schools. (Teacher, Queensland)
>
> 'Freedom and Authority' Memo from the South Australian Director-General meaningless as most Principals (this one anyway) afraid to appear to be different. Curriculum is decided by the Education Department. (Teacher, South Australia)
>
> There is very little of it - T.A.E. courses dominate this Education System. The acquisition of knowledge is often considered synonymous with education. (Principal, Western Australia)
>
> ....it means little, as the school has little autonomy really, so far as the academic aspect is concerned. (Teacher, Tasmania)

Generalising across respondents from all states, 85% reported full or partial autonomy as opposed to 15% who reported little or no curriculum autonomy. It thus appears that the majority of the Australian teaching profession perceives that it has at least some degree of curriculum autonomy; the edicts from the various Departments of Education seem to have had some effects on the freedom of teachers in curriculum development. Nevertheless, there were marked differences across states in the perceived extent of curriculum autonomy available, as shown in Table 7.6 and as discussed below.

7.3.2 *Inter-State and Inter-Respondent Differences*

The percentage of respondents who claimed to have full curriculum autonomy varied as follows: Queensland (23%); New South Wales (44%); Western Australia (49%); Tasmania (56%); South Australia (63%); Northern Territory (67%); Victoria (74%); and the A.C.T. (88%). Conversely, the percentage of respondents reporting "little or no autonomy" was highest in Queensland (35%) and lowest in A.C.T. (0%).

In general then, the Queensland teaching profession reported a fairly limited degree of curriculum autonomy being available, whereas respondents from New South Wales, Western Australia and Tasmania felt they had a moderate degree of autonomy, and respondents from South Australia, the Northern Territory, Victoria and particularly the A.C.T. perceived a fairly high degree of curriculum autonomy being available.

Generalizing across Australia, there were no major differences in the perceived extent of curriculum autonomy available to the three groups of respondents. A slightly higher percentage of teachers (58%) than principals (51%) or heads of department (52%) reported full curriculum autonomy. But this difference was counterbalanced by the fact that a greater percentage of teachers (17%) than principals (10%) or heads of department (14%) also reported "little or no autonomy". Within certain states, however, marked variations in the perceived extent of curriculum autonomy available to different respondents were apparent.

In New South Wales, a greater proportion of teachers (24%) than heads of department (15%) or principals (14%) felt that they had little or no autonomy. On the other hand, if curriculum autonomy was perceived by respondents to exist, it was more likely to be seen as being "fully" available by teachers (49%) and heads of department (41%), than by principals (29%). Conversely, a greater proportion of principals (57%) than heads of department (44%) or teachers (27%) perceived the existence of only partial curriculum autonomy.

In Victoria, all respondents reported the availability of either full or partial curriculum autonomy, with the exception of one teacher. However, a greater proportion of heads of department (82%) and teachers (76%) perceived full autonomy than did principals (58%). Conversely, a greater proportion of principals (42%) than teachers (21%) or heads of department (18%) claimed only partial autonomy.

In Queensland, no principal reported "little or no" curriculum autonomy, although most principals (71%) claimed to have only partial autonomy rather than full autonomy (29%). In contrast, 43% of teachers perceived little or no autonomy, a further 48% claimed partial autonomy, while only 10% of teachers reported full autonomy.

Responses from heads of department were mainly divided between full autonomy and little or no autonomy (42% in each category), with 17% perceiving partial autonomy.

In South Australia, no principal or head of department reported "little or no" curriculum autonomy and only 15% of the teacher responses fell into this category; indeed most respondents reported experiencing the full degree of autonomy. However, a great proportion of principals (67%) and teachers (66%) than heads of department (52%) claimed to have full autonomy. Conversely, a greater proportion of heads of department (48%) than principals (33%) or teachers (19%) perceived partial curriculum autonomy.

In Western Australia, a greater proportion of teachers (54%) and heads of department (50%) than principals (25%) felt that they had full curriculum autonomy. Conversely, little or no autonomy was reported by a greater percentage of principals (50%) than teachers (33%) or heads of department (31%).

In Tasmania, most respondents reported either full or partial curriculum autonomy. However, a greater proportion of principals (67%) than teachers (57%) or heads of department (50%) claimed to have full autonomy. Conversely, more teachers (41%) and heads of department (41%) than principals (33%) perceived partial autonomy.

In the A.C.T., all respondents stated that they had full curriculum autonomy, with the exception that two teachers reported partial autonomy.

In the Northern Territory, the majority of respondents (67%) perceived that they had full autonomy, although one head of department perceived partial autonomy and one principal claimed to have little or no autonomy.

Once again, these inter-respondent differences were itemized for the interest of readers from different states and for the purpose of suggesting further research. Such differences cannot be regarded as substantively significant.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

8.1 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Before summarizing and discussing the major findings of this study, four limitations should be re-iterated. First, the research was focused exclusively at the junior secondary school level. Second, the data consisted of self-reports by respondents in schools of their perceptions of curriculum autonomy through answers to two open-ended items as part of a detailed survey on curriculum decision-making; no observations of schools were actually carried out by the investigator. Third, there were limitations in terms of comparability of length, scope and relevance of the various answers provided. Finally, the response rate varied across different types of invitees (principals, heads of department, teachers) both within and across states.

Nevertheless, this study was based on the responses of 586 staff members from a sample of 98 Australian secondary schools. Furthermore, the research had an interesting and often complex qualitative character which could not be obtained by other more precise methods of data collection and analysis. This feature reflected the phenomenological focus of the enquiry which sought each participant's "definition of the situation" of curriculum autonomy. These factors lend confidence to the results, which have been reported in terms of their potential generalisability. The findings are summarised and discussed under three sub-headings: the meaning of curriculum autonomy; the advantages/disadvantages of curriculum autonomy; and the extent of curriculum autonomy available in schools.

8.1.1 The Meaning of Curriculum Autonomy

The vast majority of respondents who offered an interpretation of the term "curriculum autonomy" gave the same kind of answer (albeit phrased in different ways), namely: it means that the school/teachers have freedom to determine the curriculum, or it means school-based curriculum development. This interpretation is consistent with the views of curriculum experts. Moreover, the fact that only one major interpretation was offered suggests that secondary school staffs on the whole are attuned to the pervasive change in patterns of curriculum development which has been occurring across Australia over the last decade.

Most of the respondents offering this basic interpretation did so without any amplification or qualification. Amplification on the basic definition by some respondents took the form of reference to the curriculum meeting local needs and conditions, to freedom from outside interference/control, or to both of these factors. The dimension of "freedom from outside control" suggested by respondents is in accord with the working definition of curriculum autonomy derived etymologically by the author, namely: "the freedom and responsibility of a person or group to determine the curriculum without external interference or control".

While the reference by respondents to "meeting local needs and conditions" is a commonly-cited advantage of granting freedom in curriculum development to schools, it is a new and interesting dimension to actually defining curriculum autonomy. Such an emphasis possibly reflects the concern of the teaching profession that freedom in curriculum development be accompanied by an acceptance of responsibility to the local community. Support for this idea is found in the fact that a greater percentage of secondary principals (who are most directly accountable to the general public) than heads of department or teachers included this aspect in their interpretation of curriculum autonomy.

The fact that most respondents simply offered one form or another of the commonly accepted definition for curriculum autonomy does suggest a general lack of understanding in the teaching profession of the complex issues and problems involved in granting such freedom in curriculum development. However, some respondents discussed the appropriateness of different levels of autonomy within the school - individual teacher, department, school staff, or the school community (school staff, students, parents and citizens). This certainly indicates some awareness of the types of problems identified by curriculum experts such as Hughes (1978) and the CDC Study Group (Rawlinson and Spring, 1979).

8.1.2 Advantages/Disadvantages of Curriculum Autonomy

Australia-wide, respondents perceived eight major advantages/benefits associated with the granting of curriculum autonomy to schools. These are listed in order of frequency of mentioning by respondents:

(a) greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum, programs, courses (in general);
(b) better able to meet needs and interests of individual students and teachers at the local school level;
(c) greater teacher involvement, satisfaction and commitment;
(d) freedom to vary or select aspects of the curriculum guidelines supplied by the Department of Education;
(e) freedom from external restraints, pressures and interference;
(f) able to offer a particular elective or develop new school-based courses;
(g) more personalised and meaningful learning for students;
(h) greater parent/community participation in school activities.

Respondents across Australia also perceived eight major disadvantages/limitations to curriculum autonomy. These are listed in order of frequency of mentioning by respondents:

(a) limitations imposed by "external" factors, e.g. parents, exams, Department, employers;
(b) extra work in planning and co-ordination of curriculum development;
(c) lack of experienced/qualified staff for curriculum development;
(d) greater confusion, lack of guidance and lower standards in the curriculum, programs, courses (in general);
(e) negative beliefs and attitudes of staff towards curriculum autonomy;
(f) lack of finance and/or resources;
(g) mobility of staff and/or students;
(h) it causes division and frustration in the school.

The willingness of respondents to itemize, in response to an open-ended question, various advantages and disadvantages of curriculum autonomy, suggests that there has been considerable "grass-roots" discussion of the movement towards increased freedom for teachers in curriculum development. That certain advantages and disadvantages were raised more often than others does not necessarily mean that secondary teachers perceive them to be *the* most important results of granting curriculum autonomy. However, the empirical research reviewed in chapter three supports the claimed advantages of "greater freedom, flexibility and variety in the curriculum", "better meeting local needs and interests" and "greater teacher involvement, commitment and satisfaction", as well as the claimed disadvantages of "extra work/time" and "lack of experienced/qualified staff". On the other hand, other data from the CAP project indicated that teachers perceived the three main limitations to school-based curriculum development as "lack of time", "lack of finance" and "staff mobility". The latter two factors were not mentioned so frequently by respondents in the open-ended section of the questionnaire, as analysed in this research.

Looking at the whole area of advantages, the range of responses suggested by teachers covered the same types of points and arguments as proposed by various curriculum experts in the literature review of chapter three. However, as might be expected given the type of enquiry, respondents did not explore issues in as much detail as the experts. For example, while there were some general comments about increased teacher involvement, satisfaction and commitment, these did not cover the complex changes in teachers which Phillips and Nettle (1978) perceive happening as a result of granting curriculum autonomy - developing creative skills, sensitivities, reflection, observational and analytical powers. Similarly respondents did not consider the effects of democracy in schools (a corollary of granting curriculum autonomy) on staff, students and the wider community, to the same extent as did Connors (1978).

In the area of disadvantages/limitations also, respondents did not explore issues in as great a detail as curriculum experts. More importantly, however, the range of such responses offered by the secondary teaching profession was not as great as that outlined in the literature review of chapter three. Disadvantages/limitations raised by curriculum experts but not mentioned by respondents included: the lack of theoretical knowledge and models to assist schools; the danger that schools will feel a pressure to become quickly involved in the process and decisions will be made too hastily; the danger of premature evaluation and discontinuance of new practices before they have been fully implemented; lack of school autonomy in selection and deployment of staff; failure to appreciate subtleties of group interactions when the balance of power changes; isolation and large distances between centres making the delivery of support systems difficult; and failure to carry out optimizing studies to determine the distinctive contributions of different groups to curriculum development.

On the other hand, respondents from schools tended to be far more specific than curriculum experts in commenting about the effects of granting curriculum autonomy on the whole process of curriculum development, from the point of view of both advantages and disadvantages. Indeed, all major facets of curriculum development were covered in respondents' answers: aims and objectives; learning experiences; teaching methods; assessment methods; resources; and time allocation.

The data on perceived advantages and disadvantages of curriculum autonomy also revealed a wide range of reactions to the question of curriculum autonomy. At one extreme were the respondents who could only see benefits arising from the granting of curriculum autonomy, while at the other were those who focussed exclusively on disadvantages. This finding supports the research of Barnes (1979), who contrasted in case studies the views of two different school staffs. Of course many teachers in the present study recognised both positive and negative aspects associated with this movement. Of more significance perhaps was the finding that in all states, except Queensland, a greater percentage of respondents mentioned advantages/benefits than disadvantages/limitations of curriculum autonomy. This almost nation-wide trend suggests a positive rather than negative reaction by the secondary teaching profession to the granting of freedom in curriculum.

8.1.3 Perceived Extent of Curriculum Autonomy Available

Generalising across Australia, the vast majority of respondents perceived either full or partial curriculum autonomy being available in their secondary schools. This result corroborates the research of Grassie (1979), who found that more principals in 1977 than in 1972 perceived some degree of teacher involvement in determining the curriculum. It also suggests that, although the movement towards increased curriculum autonomy and school-based curriculum development has been influenced by central initiatives at state and national levels, many teachers at the "grass roots" level have welcomed and accepted this increased freedom. The wish for greater involvement expressed by N.S.W. teachers to Simpkins in 1972 was perhaps the first recorded indication of the beginning of this movement.

On the other hand, this research revealed marked differences across states in the perceived extent of curriculum autonomy available in secondary schools. Queensland teachers stood apart from their interstate colleagues in reporting, on the whole, a fairly limited degree of autonomy. By contrast, most respondents from N.S.W., Western Australia and Tasmania claimed at least partial autonomy. Moreover, a substantial majority of respondents from South Australia, the Northern Territory, Victoria, and particularly the A.C.T., reported full curriculum autonomy being available. These results again replicate to a large degree the work of Grassie (1979), who found that only in Victorian, A.C.T. and Northern Territory schools do many teachers at the school level take the primary role in deciding the curriculum.

In accounting for these results on the perceived extent of curriculum autonomy, two factors seem particularly important: the nature of the various administrative policies relating to curriculum across Australia and the length of time such policies have been operative. Of the six states, Victoria had the highest perceived degree of curriculum autonomy. This state has not only granted greater freedom to schools than other states, but was also the first to move officially in this direction. The recommendations from the Burwood Seminar in 1968 - that there should be no externally prescribed examinations or courses of study - were a landmark in the movement across Australia towards curriculum autonomy for schools (Hannan, 1970; Reed, 1970). In South Australia, the "Freedom and Authority" memorandum released in 1970 gave similar opportunities for freedom in curriculum development, which would again help to explain why secondary teachers there perceived a relatively high degree of curriculum autonomy.

The more moderate degree of autonomy perceived by secondary school staffs in Tasmania, Western Australia and N.S.W. is in accord with the fact that official moves in this area have only occurred within the last five or six years. Moreover, these states have proceeded more slowly and perhaps less radically in terms of policy. They have maintained central statements for curriculum through the syllabus committees of the various study boards, while at the same time they have produced less detailed and less prescriptive syllabi, and provided encouragement of and support for regional as well as school-based initiatives. The perceived high degree of curriculum autonomy available to secondary staffs in the territories reflects, to some extent, their unique position in Australian education. In the early 1970's, both territories encountered the opportunity to establish new education systems, the first since the nineteenth century. Both adopted the policy that schools should assume a greater degree of autonomy for curriculum than had been the case in the past.

8.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In this study several different findings were reported, relating specifically to perceptions of the meaning of curriculum autonomy, of its advantages and disadvantages, and of the extent of autonomy available in schools. The nature or magnitude of such findings were examined by the author to determine their substantive significance; the reader was invited to do likewise. No statistical tests were undertaken. Inherent in this approach to educational research, recommended by Carver (1978), is the need to carry out replication studies as well as further related research. Suggestions along this line emanating from this study include:

(a) a replication of this questionnaire survey at the primary as well as the secondary level, with special measures used to increase the response rate and to determine the views of non-respondents (a problem evident in this study);
(b) an increase in sample size for such surveys to ensure sufficient numbers for further investigation of inter-respondent - principals, heads of department, teachers - differences (a problem evident in this study);
(c) surveys utilizing structured as well as open-ended questions to investigate a variety of matters relating to curriculum autonomy (not just the three aspects of this study);
(d) in-depth case studies (utilizing questionnaires, attitude scales, interviews and most importantly, observations) of curriculum decision-making in schools reporting high, medium and low levels of curriculum autonomy;
(e) longitudinal case studies over several years to map changes of perceptions held by the staff and sub-groups of staff members, in a variety of schools, particularly those identified in (d) above;
(f) case studies and quasi-experimental studies to determine how different perceptions of curriculum autonomy influence approaches to school-based curriculum development;

(g) experimental or quasi-experimental studies to determine the effectiveness of different support systems and services for school-based curriculum development;

(h) experimental or quasi-experimental studies to compare the outcomes, in term of both student and teacher variables, of school-based versus centralised approaches to curriculum development.

8.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION

Given the limitations of this investigation outlined above and given the recognised need for replication and further research, it is possible to derive tentatively five inter-related sets of implications for education.

First, the mere fact that respondents were willing to comment freely, in response to open-ended questions, on various aspects of curriculum autonomy says something obvious but important about secondary school teachers across Australia. Not only have they been sensitive to the movement granting schools more freedom to determine the curriculum, but they have apparently engaged in some thinking and discussion about such developments. This suggests that the time is opportune for review and for possible further action by a number of different groups, including administrators, curriculum developers and consultants, teacher educators, parents and other groups in the community, and teachers themselves. The directions which such courses of action could take might be decided in the light of the specific implications discussed below, as well as from consultation amongst the groups concerned and from further research.

Second, although some awareness exists, there is a need to raise considerably teachers' understanding of the issues, complexities, benefits and problems associated with the devolution of authority for curriculum to the schools. For example, in this study few respondents considered the appropriateness of different levels of autonomy within the school; nor were many able to itemise a full range of advantages and/or disadvantages. The type and effectiveness of curriculum development styles adopted in any school would seem to be dependent, in large measure, upon such staff understandings. Therefore, a variety of pre- and in-service courses, pitched at different levels, should be provided for teachers by tertiary institutions and departments of education. As school-based curriculum development should ideally involve students, parents and others in the local community, it seems desirable that these groups also be given opportunities to increase their understandings. Finally, to provide maximum opportunity for access, such courses should be offered on as systematic and co-ordinated a basis as possible, both within and across states.

A third set of implications may be derived from the cited advantages and disadvantages of curriculum autonomy. Teachers perceive real benefits associated with the granting of such freedom, particularly having greater flexibility and variety in the curriculum, better meeting the needs of individuals, and increasing teacher involvement, satisfaction and commitment. These findings, together with the fact that advantages were generally raised more often than disadvantages, suggest that administrators should extend even more autonomy to the nation's secondary schools. At the same time, however, administrators would have to determine in which areas of potential constraint could greater freedom be granted, for example, general policies, specific curriculum policies, examination systems, lighter teaching loads to allow time for curriculum planning and co-ordination, release time for in-service courses in curriculum development, and increased finance for resources. Priorities would need to be determined in response to and in consultation with teachers, parents, employers and the wider community.

Fourth, the wide range of reactions to the idea of curriculum autonomy suggests that a single approach to curriculum development, either at the school, regional or state level, will not work effectively with all teachers, or indeed with all communities. For each level, therefore, a variety of structures and frameworks should be established to allow for different degrees of participation in curriculum development by teachers and others, as the participants themselves see fit. More specifically, the main problem for central and regional administrators is how to reconcile, in the eyes of teachers and others in the community, the claimed conflict between,on the one hand, system accountability and Ministerial responsibility, and on the other, curriculum autonomy and school-based curriculum development. The most important challenge for school principals and staffs is how to create the right climate to allow the co-existence of different styles of curriculum development within each school.

A fifth and final set of implications may be derived from the data on perceived extent of curriculum autonomy available in schools. It is clear that many teachers have accepted, and indeed welcomed, the increased freedom granted by central educational authorities in the area of curriculum development. This suggests that a new era has definitely arrived in Australian education: an era of freedom, diversity and potential creativity for the school, which has, at the same time, elements of risk, insecurity and potential confusion. The latter aspects were reflected in the marked differences found within and across states in the extent of curriculum autonomy perceived as being available in secondary schools. Administrators in each state and territory should examine the reported perceptions of their secondary staffs to determine the degree of congruence with official policies and expectations. The data on claimed disadvantages of and limitations to curriculum autonomy, would help to explain any such incongruencies and would indicate potential areas for further support of school-based curriculum development.

In conclusion, this study revealed a wide range of perceptions about curriculum autonomy held by secondary school staffs across Australia. There was certainly evidence that teachers have shown both awareness and acceptance of the movement granting schools more freedom and responsibility to determine the curriculum. However, within and across states teachers varied greatly: not only in their opinions about the advantages and disadvantages associated with curriculum autonomy, but also in the degree of autonomy reported to be available to them in their schools.

> ...schools can be creative only when they have at least a minimum amount of autonomy vis-a-vis their environment. Autonomy alone, however, is not a sufficient condition for creativity. Of more importance, is the extent that it is used by educational institutions. (CERI, 1978: 55)

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